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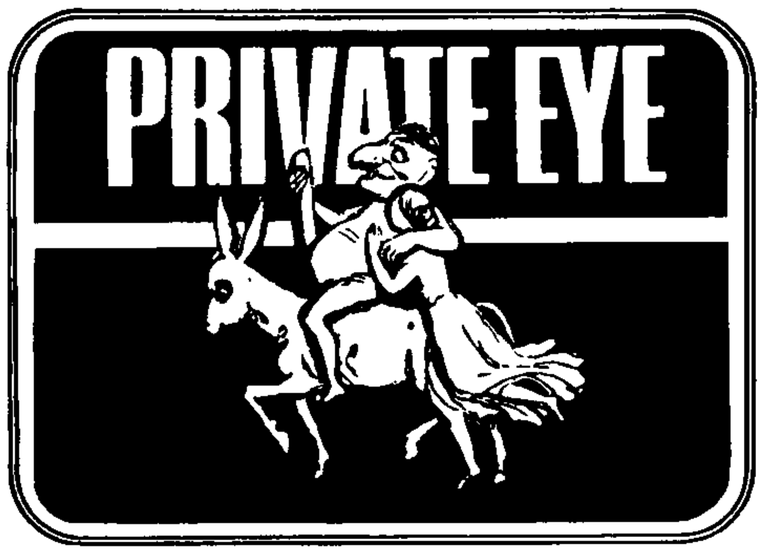


Reading the Roons

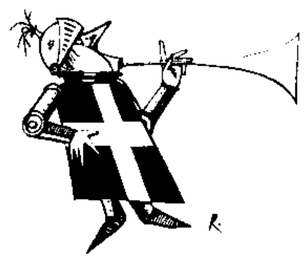
- **For Foulkes' sake! HP Sauce on standards; Fatty's new job & Portland's Tim Allan** 8, 9
- **M.D. on alternative medicine balls** 12
- **Home Office blunders latest; plus why NHS privatisation is a bit sick** 28, 29
- **Slicker on the lessons of Enron** 30, 31

" It's John Prescott's croquet mallet"

THE utter futility of New Labour targets – in particular the Public Service Agreements (PSA) under which government departments have operated for seven years – were underlined in a parliamentary answer from Treasury Minister Stephen Timms last week.

Asked what progress the Home Office was making, Timms replied: "The latest figures on the Home Office's performance against its PSA target to 'reassure the public, reducing the fear of crime and antisocial behaviour, and building confidence in the criminal justice system without compromising fairness', show that the Department is on course or ahead of target in all components of the target."

Could this possibly be the same government department that the week before was described by new Home Secretary John Reid as "not fit for purpose" and "inadequate in terms of its information technology, leadership, management, systems and processes"? It certainly could.



EYE TOLD YOU SO

HEALTH minister Lord Warner has been busy preparing the ground for the long-awaited National Audit Office (NAO) report into the NHS national programme for IT (NPfIT).

Having claimed to *Channel 4 News* in April that the project was "broadly on time", he admitted to the *Financial Times* last week that the key clinical records element was at least two years behind schedule – delays the *Eye* has been reporting for weeks (see last three issues).

He also admitted that spending by hospital trusts on installing new systems would add £10bn to their costs, which had oddly gone unmentioned until *Eye* 1158 pointed them out. And that's without the £6.2bn budgeted for the organisation running NPfIT, Connecting for Health.

Warner insisted that he was seeking to "clear up confusion in the public arena". Given the absence of information on costs and delays (access to the original plans was quietly removed from the CfH website months ago while only questions from the *Eye* revealed the billions spent so far for minimal return), any confusion would have been entirely down to him. But even by the minister's own admission, the whole saga is desperately behind schedule and set to cost tens of billions of pounds – just what critics have long feared.

PS: This outbreak of ministerial candour might be related to the possibility that Lord Warner won't be in the job too much longer anyway. On *Newsnight* two weeks ago he promised that use of the "choose and book" GP referral system would hit the target of around 10 million appointments a year by next March and that he would resign if it didn't. Take-up by reluctant GPs will have to increase around six fold on current rates for that to happen.

THE prospects of the Metrix consortium now bidding for the massive £19bn military defence training review (DTR) PFI deal cannot have been harmed by the fact that three of the consortium (EDS, Sodexho and Nord Anglia) are all clients of Foresight Communications.

This is the PR company that the former defence minister responsible for the DTR contract, Ivor Caplin, has recently joined.

As revealed in *Eye* 1158, Caplin was initially reluctant to give details of his role to the advisory committee on business appointments (ACBA) that polices the revolving door between government and business. He has eventually done so for this and another new job, prompting the following response from the ACBA: "The committee noted these two appointments, which had been accepted without the committee's advice being sought, but, in view of the lapse of time between leaving the government and taking them up, it saw no difficulty with them provided he did not become personally involved in lobbying ministers or officials for 12 months after he left office."

As Caplin left office just over a year ago, he can immediately lobby for his clients on the very contract (the biggest PFI deal ever) for which he recently had ministerial responsibility.

PS: Tony Blair actually wants to *relax* the rules on such appointments.

DESPITE tough talk about sacking the civil servants he deemed responsible for the foreign prisoners fiasco, bruiser John Reid, the new Home Secretary, merely instigated a bit of job swopping for Digby Griffith, deputy head of enforcement and removals, and Brodie Clark, director of operations and projects at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate.

Clark, the *Eye* has learnt, is now in charge of the nation's "border management". Not bad considering that in 1994 when he was the governor in charge of Whitemoor prison's "borders", six inmates – five of them armed IRA terrorists – made a break for freedom!

A few days later Semtex explosives were also found in the Cambridgeshire prison. Clark had apparently been sent into Whitemoor to sort out its lax security. But the spectacular breaches occurred three months into his watch – clearly before he had time to manage his borders.

MORE on the latest EDS shambles – the RAF's new Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) payroll system that has left thousands or personnel with the wrong wages.

Like previous EDS cock-ups, this one too is generating "cost overruns". Disclosures under the Freedom of Information Act show the JPA budget to have risen from £112m to £163m in 18 months on a deal that was not competitively tendered but awarded as an "amendment" to an existing contract two years ago.

With the army and navy also due to take the system soon (much later than planned), this might not be the end of it – especially since EDS is now starting work on an even larger defence deal: the £3bn MoD "defence infrastructure" IT contract it won last year.

HEALTH Minister Lord Warner was very upbeat when announcing that private health firm Care UK would run GP services in Barking. "This new competition can only be good news for NHS patients," he gushed.

Well, it's certainly good news for Care UK which has a long-term strategy to take over NHS services.

Care UK's board also has a seat for Ruth Carnall, formerly director of the NHS "Departmental Change Programme". While the NHS is changing by paying private firms to do medical work, Carnall has changed too by turning herself into a private health director.

EDITORIAL
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ABC

NEWS FROM THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER

THE briefing given by NATO/International Security Assistance Force commander Lt Gen David Richards in Kabul on 4 June did little to restore confidence among the lads in the abilities of our senior officers.

Announcing new tactics designed to prevent any more rioting, Richards told reporters that in future "we will be a very people focused and a very people-friendly force", adding that we will also have to "accept more risk" when driving in order to prevent the sort of road accident that led to the Kabul riot.

But there is a tactical problem here. Letting the Taliban know that if they attack a patrol in future soldiers will be less likely to drive off at high speed or return fire, may be unwise when the insurgency is growing in confidence. And there is also a strategic problem. It's not ISAF who needs to become more "people focused": it's the Americans. It was the Americans and the Afghan police who opened fire on the mob following the Memorial Day pile-up. ISAF was nowhere to be seen.

The problem is that the Yanks are taught that "force protection", as they call it, or self-defence, is always the priority. That rule tends to mean that as soon as an incident starts, rounds are poured out in the general direction of the "threat", whether it is an insurgent with an RPG or an old lady with a broom.

ISAF, and especially the British, suffer from exactly the opposite problem. The rules of engagement are already so "people friendly" that the lads, worried about being court martialled, are sometimes reluctant to open fire until it is too bloody late.

When the mob decided to attack western NGOs and guest houses, once again ISAF troops were nowhere to be seen – even when rioters stormed the Serena Hotel ("butler service available on request") and torched a Chinese "restaurant" notorious for supplying women for Ugandan discussions.

Westerners retreated behind the doors of their compounds, expecting ISAF and NATO troops to come to their rescue, driving sensibly and waving at the locals en route. But they did not. The truth is that ISAF is only there to support the Afghan police. It has no responsibility to rescue anybody and as the rioters had their fun, ISAF troops stayed in their bashas "on standby throughout the day", much to the fury of foreign workers, many of whom were rescued in the end by brave Afghans.

'Square Basher'

JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

SINCE November immigrants wanting to take the UK's citizenship tests must be able to demonstrate an "acceptable degree" of skill in the English language. But how are people supposed to learn it?

An interim report from a study by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education has uncovered "enormous problems" with the availability of English classes for speakers of other languages (ESOL). As demand for the classes has risen (by 65 percent in the past two years), little has been done to boost the number of courses and there is a national shortage of qualified ESOL teachers.

Many areas have long waiting lists for courses and the inspectorates looking after colleges and adult education services say ESOL is "probably the weakest curriculum area" in the whole learning and skills sector. But surely the government saw this coming? Surely it worked out that encouraging immigrants to learn English might result in more people signing up to learn English and planned accordingly?

Street Of Shame

A UN peacekeeping force may soon be heading for London following the latest breakdown of the non-aggression pact between the *Mail* and *Express*.

Mail diarist Ephraim Hardcastle, aka Peter McHackey, ended the ceasefire last week with a long item about Richard "Dirty" Desmond's appointment as president of a Jewish children's charity. McHackey gleefully listed some of Dirty Des's "exotic TV interests", including shows that feature "the sexiest, fresh-faced [teenage] beauties misbehaving" and "unpolished home-grown sluts doing what they love".

The terms of the peace treaty, negotiated in 2002, are quite clear: if the *Mail* ever mentions Dirty Des's porn empire, he'll retaliate by printing stories about Lord Rothermere's family – and particularly about Lady Rothermere's father, colourful former car-dealer Terry Clemence.

But now Desmond has a further weapon in his armoury. He recently bought the serial rights to the biography of Sixties chanteuse Kathy Kirby, *Secrets, Loves and Lip Gloss*, which describes her descent into bankruptcy. Although an extract appeared in the *Sunday Express* last month, Dirty Des hasn't yet run Kirby's harrowing account of how her family shunned her – even keeping the date of her own mother's funeral from her.

If Desmond were feeling really vindictive he might even reveal how, after this 25-year estrangement, Kirby's sister Pat suddenly got in touch with her a few months ago and started sending her generous gifts as publication day loomed.

Why would this embarrass the *Mail*? Strange but true: Kathy Kirby's sister also happens to be the mother of Lady Rothermere.

THE *Sun* devoted several pages to its "War On Knife Thugs", with readers encouraged to sign up to a petition demanding longer prison sentences for those caught carrying blades.

"Kids need to learn a simple lesson: Knives are not cool, nor do they keep you safe," declared an editorial on 20 May. "Parents, schools and police must step up efforts to counter the culture of the knife."

The *Sun*'s proprietor Rupert Murdoch is certainly doing his bit. His new weekly magazine *Love It!*, as advertised copiously on a daily basis in the *Sun*, bears the tantalising coverline: "I Stabbed My Toy Boy Over Sexy Snaps."

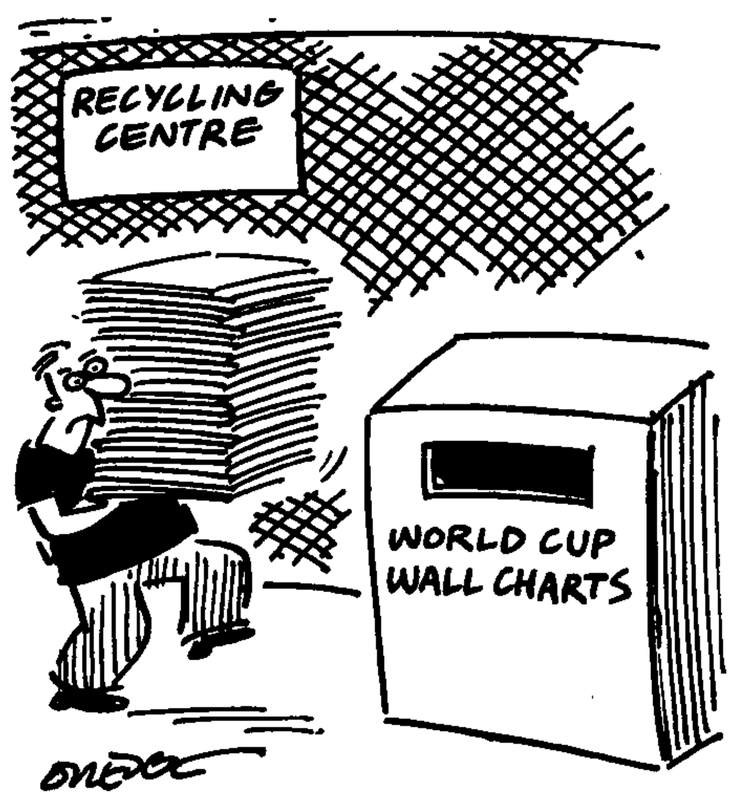
GAMBLING is the latest target of the *Independent*'s high moral tone. Its main story on 25 May warned that Britain's betting habits are "out of control", with a 41 percent rise in people seeking help for gambling problems last year.

"Among the reasons is the advance of new technology," it noted perceptively. "The internet has made it easier to place a bet than ever before."

The good news, however, is that one man's life-wrecking addiction is another man's profit opportunity. For Independent News & Media plc, the newspaper's publisher, now has a 20 percent stake in Cashcade Ltd, a leading web-based gaming company!

"Cashcade, which has over 400,000 registered users, is already profitable and has grown strongly since its launch in 2001," the 2005 annual report of Independent News and Media gushes. It has achieved an annual turnover of more than $100m by "providing services ranging from casino to bingo to poker".

Services, eh? So that's all right then.



"EVIL EYE" shrieked the *Sun* over the news that the producers of *Big Brother* had been "blasted by mental health chiefs after "ANOTHER vulnerable contestant... a fifth unstable housemate" had been added to the *Big Brother* house.

"Pre-op transsexual Sam has told housemates: 'I'm the most paranoid person ever'," pointed out shocked hackette Emma Cox. "Shahbaz threatened to kill himself on live TV before walking out. Lea suffers from body dysmorphia – hating her looks. Nikki has been sectioned over her anorexia and Pete has Tourette's syndrome."

"A trigger for suicide is putting these kind of people under stress," the paper was told by Marjorie Wallace, the chief executive of Sane – the very expert who, in 2003, "blasted" the *Sun* for "doing the media and the public a huge disservice" with its "Bonkers Bruno" front page. So how is the newly-responsible *Sun* dealing with these fragile individuals? Well, an editorial has called them a "houseful of loons" and "nuts in May".

JUST FANCY THAT!

"After a weary, cagey performance at the White House on Thursday night the *New York Times* observed that Mr Blair looked 'dismayed and tongue-tied'. The report even suggested that for once George Bush had to come to the prime minister's rescue." – Julian Borger, *Grauniad*, 27 May.

"Blair still retains all the dignities of office. His command on his feet continues to impress Americans embarrassed by Bush's lack of fluency. And he was genuinely impressive at Thursday's White House press conference..." – Martin Kettle, *Grauniad*, 27 May.

AGHAST at the Law Commission's suggestion that cohabitees should have the same rights as married couples, the *Daily Mail* reached for one of its big guns.

"Marriage is a huge commitment, a great responsibility," thundered Esther Rantzen (for it was she) on the leader page last Friday. "But it was one I was proud to take on, and have never regretted."

After an enraptured accou nt of her 23-year marriage to Desmond "Desi" Wilcox, Esther concluded: "No one pretends that marriage is easy. But the answer is not to destroy its value, undermine its value and reward those who refuse to make a lasting commitment to each other."

She should know. Though she quite forgot to mention it, Esther seduced Desi while he was still wed to his first wife, Patsy. She compounded the offence in her memoirs, in 2001, by chiding the jilted wife for being "inconsolable and... angry and bitter until the day she died" – possibly, as one reviewer noted, because Patsy had been chucked out of the opulent family house to make way for Esther, and forced to move into a small flat.

WITH former *Sunday Telegraph* editor Sarah Sands having switched her from foreign editor to the unusual position of associate editor with special responsibility for the gadgets page, Topaz Amoore was only too pleased when new boss Patience Wheatcroft offered her another career move.

Like many of the other comely women journalists appointed by Dominic Lawson while he was still editor, Amoore has failed to prosper under his female successors. So she leapt at Wheatcroft's suggestion that she become the paper's new restaurant critic.

Arrangements were duly made for her first review – of Jamie Oliver's new eaterie in Cornwall, which specialises in seafood. Then Topaz thought she ought to mention that she doesn't eat fish.

She is no longer the paper's restaurant critic.

"DYLAN Jones did a very good interview with David Cameron in *GQ*. It's the only men's magazine that's going to do that," says Tony Parsons in the *Independent*'s My Media column.

All very flattering for Jones, *GQ*'s editor, though nothing less than he deserved after the September issue of the magazine had described Parsons as being on "impressively depth-charging, straight-talking form" in his latest novel. Mind you, a month earlier, Parsons had praised Jones's pisspoor *IPod, Therefore I Am* as "wise, witty and fabulously entertaining – a must-read book".

Of course the fact that Parsons is a contributing editor to Jones's magazine is in no way related to these songs of mutual praise. Otherwise, that connection would surely have been mentioned.

LIKE millions of people the world over, *Daily Telegraph* feature writer Jan Moir has long been puzzled by the weird hue of Paul McCartney's hair.

She sought expert advice on the subject while having her own hair done at Daniel Galvin's salon in Marylebone salon last week. If Macca's so rich, Moir wondered aloud, why can't he afford a more convincing dye? Doesn't he realise how silly he looks?

The *Telegraph* hack's tirade was interrupted by a loud and urgent shushing from her stylist. Sir Paul, it transpired, was in the building at that very moment, having his roots retinted!

JUST FANCY THAT!

"The planet, standing again, and how I got interesting – Exclusive Al Gore interview."
– *Guardian*, page 1, 31 May

"Gore bores on. I'm drifting off at the *Guardian* Hay festival as Al Gore tells us how to save the planet... we're in drearsville."
– *Guardian* sports section, page 1, 31 May

"SAD news of the demise of Keira Knightley's West End stage debut," revealed Oliver Marre, the *Observer*'s dashing young Pendennis, on 28 May.

"She was being lined up, reportedly, to appear in *My Fair Lady*, which is news to the play's director, Trevor Nunn. 'Keira is a wonderful, talented actress, but no, I'm not seeking her for *My Fair Lady*,' he tells me. 'There are two wonderful people [Amy Nuttall and Lisa O'Hare] playing Eliza on the current tour of the play and I'm very happy with them'."

But there was good news too. "I would not rule out working with Keira in the future – in fact, I'd be very keen to," Nunn told Marre. Or not, as the case may be. For the entire story, including all the quotes, had been lifted by Marre verbatim from a diary item in the *Daily Express*'s Day & Night column on 18 May, a mere 10 days earlier.

TINKER, TAILOR, SOLDIER, FILM-MAKER

THE curious troika of ex-*Sunday People* journalist Greg Harkin, ex-soldier turned IRA infiltrator (and jailbird) Kevin Fulton and ex-army intelligence officer Martin Ingram are doing sterling work in filling newspaper columns in a quiet period.

Ingram's entertaining allegations against Martin McGuinness have kickstarted a summer offensive, with Fulton next up to reveal all.

Ingram claimed in Tony O'Reilly's *Sunday World* last week that McGuinness was a long-time MI6 agent. Oddly, given the importance he suddenly attaches to it, Ingram made no mention of this in his and Harkin's book, *Stakeknife: Britain's Secret Agents in Ireland*, which is only two years old.

Determined to maintain his own place in the limelight, Fulton has entrusted his own latest set of revelations to that well-known home of investigative journalism, John Blake Publishing. Later this month Blake will release the 288-page *Unsung Hero* which, according to the blurb, focuses on Omagh: "It was the worst single atrocity of the Troubles. Only it could have been avoided. Kevin Fulton had infiltrated the IRA. When news came to him of the planned attack, he handed the information on to his handlers. It was ignored. This is just one of the revelations in this, the most significant book ever to be published about the ongoing war in Northern Ireland... it will profoundly change the way the Troubles are viewed, and it will cause a stir in the highest echelons of government."

Not necessarily. In December 2004, Mainstream published all 240 pages of *The Fulton File: A Soldier of the Dirty War*. In this version, "Fulton became a household name in 2001, following claims that he had passed on information that dissident Republicans were planning a bomb attack in Northern Ireland, 48 hours before a Real IRA bomb exploded in Omagh, killing 28 people. Kevin Fulton has said that he always wanted to be a soldier. *The Fulton File* is his story of how far he surpassed that ambition and the profound effect it has had on his life".

Fulton has – like Ingram – suddenly remembered vital new information less than two years since he last told his tale. And these latest claims will not be the last anyone hears from men who, despite their relatively lowly ranks in the army, mysteriously seem to have has some involvement during every potentially newsworthy event in Ulster over the past 20 years.

For big movie bucks are beckoning. In March this year *Atlantic Monthly* published a long interview with Fulton by Matthew Teague, which repeated Fulton's fanciful claim (first published in the *Sindie* last year) that the IRA was behind the Iraqi "resistance" – but that the evil Brits were ultimately to blame for colluding with the IRA to develop roadside bombs in the first place.

This went down very well in Hollywood. Warner Bros eventually closed a deal with Teague to develop a screenplay featuring Fulton as the hero betrayed by wicked British spooks. Alas, Harkin and Ingram then claimed that Teague had lifted chunks of their own book. Ingram's lawyers are now trying to get him included in the film deal. Oscars here we come!

HOW THEY ARE RELATED

WHY did the *Evening Standard*, a London paper, dedicate one of its "Urban Fox" magazine pages to an Oxford University fashion show and what it described as "the bright and beautiful things" who were present?

A clue perhaps lay in the name of one of the models on parade, Sophie Bower. Or, as she is better known to employees of the *Standard*, the editor's daughter.

HOGGWATCH

Yeoman of the *Guardian*

BEFORE football envelops everything, let us briefly sing the praise of cricket hacks on the *Grauniad*. Ever since the days of Sir Neville Cardus, they have been more than mere reporters: they're writers, literary craftsmen who carve and polish each image until... well, until it looks just like all the others.

"[Matthew] Hoggard's was still a yeoman effort by any standard... Dennis Lillee did it like that, although with less of the ploughman's plod back to his mark." – Mike Selvey, *Guardian*, 15 March 2002.

"Matthew Hoggard's yeoman efforts into a Manchester gale last summer..." – Mike Selvey, 20 March 2002.

"Hoggard's ploughman's trudge back to his mark is a familiar sight and seems to typify his workman's role within the side." – Mike Selvey, 8 March 2004.

"Hoggard, a yeoman bowler, did take the wicket of Pollock first thing..." – Mike Selvey, 17 January 2005.

"A hayrick-haired son of the soil with a heart of oak... Matthew Hoggard is a country boy whose ploughman-plod has its roots in solitary dogwalking out on the moors." – Mike Selvey, 18 January 2005.

"The destiny of the Ashes may have come down to the sheer bloody-minded determination of a floppy-haired son of the soil. When Matthew Hoggard's ploughman's gait took him to the crease..." – Mike Selvey, 29 August 2005.

"The yeoman Matthew Hoggard's timely charge." – Mike Selvey, 12 September 2005.

"Bringing up the rear of an England innings, we expect Matthew Hoggard's yeoman forward prod." – Mike Selvey, 23 February 2006.

"Alongside Flintoff, Hoggard has been England's player of the series, a revelation in conditions... as far removed from the reality of fast-medium bowling as a Pennine stroll with the dogs is from a trek to scale K2." – Mike Selvey, 20 March.

"Hoggard had set the scene with a new-ball masterclass. The country boy is shorn of his hayrick locks now but the power remains." – Mike Selvey, 13 May.

"Cover for Harmison's height and pace exists in Stuart Broad, Liam Plunkett and Chris Tremlett, and for Matthew Hoggard, should the warhorse ever pull a fetlock, with James Anderson..." – Mike Selvey, 17 May.

One of those plough-pulling warhorses, presumably...

CAMERON SHOCK

WAS Tory party chairman Francis Maude or anyone else in the shadow cabinet listening when David Cameron made his high-profile speech saying there was "more to life than money"?

Maude, the MP for Horsham, appears to live by the opposite adage and believe there's "more to money than life". Not only is he in charge of the party's A list of preferred election candidates, but he's just taken on another job chairing the Mission Marketing Group, an advertising firm that helps sell junk food like crisps and cola.

This is on top of his deputy chairmanship of the insurance firm Benfield – and in addition to being chairman of financial firm Prestbury; chairman of the Jubilee Investment Trust; chairman of the phone firm Globalink; chairman of the Hemisphere Property Fund; and a director of the internet firm Mediasurface. No, we don't know how he does it either.

Maude is not the only senior Tory whose "work life balance" is way out of kilter. Cameron should also have a word with Hugo Swire, his Shadow Culture Spokesman, who moonlights as a director of Photo-Me International, the train station photo booth people, and has a third job as a "risk consultant" for Aon plc.

Shadow Education Secretary David Willets works as an adviser to Dresdner Kleinwort bank every morning, and also gives business advice to actuaries Punter Southall – but as he's reputed to have two brains, perhaps this is in order.

Meanwhile Shadow International Development Secretary Andrew Mitchell moonlights as an adviser to management consultancy Accenture, holds six directorships for bankers Lazard and is on the board of another management consultancy, the Foundation. And Shadow Welsh Secretary Cheryl Gillan has a part-time job advising accountancy firm PKF on marketing.

There may well be more to life than money, but did anyone tell the shadow cabinet?

SLIDING the last dagger into Charles Kennedy in January, Liberal Democrat MP Matthew Taylor was quick to assure onlookers that he was only doing it out of concern for his leader's nearest and dearest.

"I'm worried for him and his family if he can't get this in hand," he told the *Independent*. "His priority must be his health and his family if he is to tackle this huge personal task of overcoming his addiction," he informed the *Telegraph*, while he assured the *Sunday Times* that "Charles needs now to reflect on what is best for his own health, his family and for the party."

How committed Taylor is to family values was revealed in last week's *News of the World*, where it emerged that at exactly the time he was expressing his concern for Sarah and Donald Kennedy, he was embarking on a relationship with the wife of one of his constituents, who is now four months pregnant with his child.

Number crunchings

9 ■ Number of cabinet committees John Prescott now chairs instead of having a ministerial job

7 ■ Number of cabinet committees Jack Straw now chairs as well as having a ministerial job

CALLED TO ORDURE

ANOTHER fortnight in the House of Lords, another outburst of laughable loyalty to Tony Blair by ex-Labour MP George Foulkes – or the Noble Lord, Lord Foulkes of Cumnock as this sometime drunk is now more properly addressed.

Foulkes's most memorable contribution to British politics remains the night in 1993 when he got fantastically pissed at a Scottish Whisky Association tasting, came over all aggressive while rushing to a Commons division and ended up assaulting a rozzer following an incident at the entrance to the House of Lords in which an old lady was knocked to the ground. He resigned as John Smith's junior defence spokesman before Bow Street magistrates fined him £1,000 and he would have been sacked.

However, his recent boorish pronouncements in the Upper House – standing up for Prescott, attacking Freedom of Information procedures, slagging off Labour peers who dared question anti-terrorism laws – don't encourage one to see him as a reformed, serious character.

In late May Foulkes lumbered into some exchanges about Sir Alistair Graham, the man chosen by Blair to scrutinise standards in public life. Most people think the standards chief plays an important role, right? Wrong! Ex-TGWU sweat Graham has irked Blairites by criticising the cash-for-peerages scandal and actually insisting on doing his job in an impartial, rigorous way. Foulkes and his ilk were particularly incensed when Graham accused the PM of being "luke-warm" about standards. Graham added that he thought New Labour was now as "sleazy" as John Major's Tories.

During Lords' Question Time Foulkes grandly announced: "More than three weeks ago I wrote to Sir Alistair Graham, asking what he did to check his facts and whether he consulted the members of his committee before making public statements." Throwing back his head in disgust, Foulkes added: "I have not yet had the courtesy of a reply. Would not Sir Alistair be better employed dealing with correspondence from Members of this House, rather than making unsubstantiated and gratuitous allegations to the media?"

This was too much for several of their lordships, some of whom started chuckling at Foulkes's fruity indignation. But Lady Amos, Leader of the Lords, had plainly been expecting Foulkes's contribution (yes, the planted question, once the preserve of Commons whips, seems to have arrived in the Lords) and replied severely that it was, "incumbent on everyone in public service, especially those in government and those operating in independent organisations, to respond in a timely fashion to correspondence from Members of the House".

Amos even had some lengthy quotation from Cabinet Secretary Sir Gus O'Donnell to reinforce her remarks. Plainly a planted question, then.

Other Labour greasers piled in after Foulkes. Lord Anderson of Swansea, or Commons backbench plodder Donald Anderson as he used to be, argued that New Labour's sleaze wasn't a patch on the Tories' sleaze. "Compared with the position, say, 10 years ago, this Government are as pure as the driven snow," he croaked. Lady Amos was delighted. "My Lords, I could not have put it any better myself," she cried.

Lady Amos, meanwhile, was asked to give an assurance that any report made by Sir John Bourn would be published. Bourn is another of Whitehall's standards arbiters, given the specific task of making sure ministers do not get into conflicts of interest. So, would Bourn's reports be public information? Don't bet on it. Lady Amos: "I cannot give that commitment. It was certainly not a recommendation of the Committee on Standards in Public Life." We therefore have a standards system whose very reports may be kept secret.

It was left to another Labour peer, Lord Hughes of Woodside (Aberdeen MP Bob Hughes, as was) to complete a good day's regulator-bashing for the Blairite regime. Referring to Sir Alistair Graham, Hughes said: "My Lords, should not someone who is appointed to be chairman of an independent committee be circumspect in his comments, not speak from the hip? He should discuss matters in the committee itself and represent the committee's views rather than his own. Sir Alistair was appointed to be chairman of the committee, not as God almighty."

In her reply Lady Amos said: "My Lords, I have my personal views about that, but I have expressed the Government's continued support for the work of the Committee on Standards in Public Life." In other words, "I totally agree that Sir Alistair Graham is a complete tosser but I'm not supposed to say so."

'Gavel Basher'

UNTIL it was destroyed by fire six months ago, New Labour fund-raising guru Lord Levy used a Marylebone mews flat as his office – even though it had always been a designated home and no planning permission was ever sought or given for change of use.

Although other residents in the mews had lodged complaints with the local council, Levy rebuffed them by insisting that he really did live there – and that his secretary, Jean, was actually a housekeeper.

Not so. The charade was finally discovered by police and firefighters after the blaze. In the "bedroom" (the seat of the fire, which had apparently been started by an unextinguished cigarette) they found no bed, indeed "no sleeping arrangements" at all, but a large amount of charred and melted office equipment.

After we revealed the scam in *Eye* 1151, Westminster council belatedly sprang into action, warning Levy "that the lawful use of the premises is for residential purposes and that it should not be used for office purposes". The council would "monitor the use of the property in future" and take enforcement action against his lordship "should it be used for unlawful purposes".

We shall see. With the flat rebuilt, Levy moved back into the mews two weeks ago – along with his faithful secretary. Can he really intend to use it as a full-scale office again? No doubt the council will start its promised "monitoring" forthwith.

"Luckily scythes aren't a problem"

MAN IN THE EYE

NICHOLAS SOAMES MP

WHEN the Hon Nicholas "Fatty" Soames MP resigned as Shadow Defence Secretary after last year's general election, he explained: "Parliament is going to be much more important now and I want to take an important role on the backbenches." The new register of members' interests reveals that this noble sense of duty hasn't stopped him taking on a non-executive directorship at Aegis Defence Services Ltd – a private military outfit run by the famous mercenary Lt Col Tim Spicer, a former Scots Guards officer.

Spicer is the largest single shareholder in Aegis Defence Services Ltd. Other shares are owned by companies registered in Sierra Leone, the Cayman Islands and South Africa – and by Frederick Forsyth, author of the classic mercenary novel The Dogs of War.

Aegis opened for business in 2003, when it made a loss of £380,000 on sales of just £553,000. Its fortunes improved dramatically in May 2004 when the Pentagon awarded the tiny fledgling company a $293m contract for "coordination of security in Iraq" – even though Aegis wasn't even on the US government's list of recommended security firms. It was the largest such deal awarded in post-Saddam Iraq to a non-American company.

Last October disgruntled ex-employees released a video of Aegis contractors apparently firing machine-gun rounds at civilian cars along the stretch of road between Baghdad airport and the Green Zone. The incident is the subject of a US military inquiry, but hasn't prevented the Pentagon from renewing Aegis's contract.

Soames isn't neglecting his parliamentary duties, of course. In March this year he asked the then Foreign Secretary Jack Straw "to define British interests in the Middle East", a question of no small interest to Aegis. When Straw referred him to a government website, Soames blew a fuse and reported the matter to a newspaper diary column.

But then Fatty is prone to volcanic eruptions. In August 2002, in his local Mid-Sussex Leader newspaper, he attacked the Conservative Party's "mad obsession with gays, blacks and women", warning that "we have got to stop boring people with irrelevant issues, like how many gay candidates we have, and concentrate on issues that matter to ordinary, decent people instead of a few weirdos in Islington".

By last December, however, he was praising the "outstanding" leadership candidate David Cameron. "I was one of David Cameron's earliest backers and he has been a close friend of mine for many years and I believe that he will be an outstanding and dynamic leader and provide direction, understanding and new ideas."

So no doubt he approves of Cameron's rebranded, gay-friendly, tree-hugging Tories. But what do they make of him?

CLIMATE CHANGE – PRESCOTT'S WARNING

PORTLAND STONED

THE KNIVES are out for former Downing Street aide Tim Allan... and they are being wielded by Labour MPs. Although Allan left Number Ten in 2000 to pursue a living in PR – after six years as Alastair Campbell's deputy, this hardly represented a career change – his influence seems to linger on.

Allan now runs Portland PR whose clients include BSkyB, for whom he briefly worked. Last December he leaked to New Labour's favourite hack Tom Baldwin a tape of *Today* programme presenter John Humphrys making unflattering comments about various government ministers at a private business seminar. The resulting media furore was a double coup for Allan since it embarrassed Sky's main rival, the Beeb, and created trouble for Humphrys, a long-time thorn in the side of Allan's friends in Downing Street.

But Allan was himself the victim of a leak when, in February, documents advising Sky's head of communications Matthew Anderson on how to ingratiate himself with culture and media minister Tessa Jowell ended up in the papers (see *Eye* 1155).

Allan is also a close friend of pensions minister James Purnell – they were flatmates and Purnell was best man at Allan's wedding – who was identified in April as the man behind a story in the *Guardian* accusing Gordon Brown of trying to oust Tony Blair from power.

Now Labour backbenchers have started asking awkward questions about how far Allan's schmoozing of Whitehall really goes. In the last month, no fewer than nine questions have been tabled asking ministers "what meetings officials in the [their] department have had with representatives of the public relations company Portland PR; what contracts Portland PR has with his Department and agencies for which he has responsibility; and what the nature of the contract is in each case".

Most of the responses give nothing away ("The departments for which I am responsible do not maintain central lists of such meetings. Civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and business delivery"), although leader of the House Jack Straw admits that two special advisers working for his predecessor Geoff Hoon had attended "a summer garden party on 13 July 2005 hosted by Portland PR".

What makes this development interesting is the identity of those tabling the questions, most of whom could never be bracketed in the "awkward squad". Leading the charge are key Gordon Brown allies Doug Henderson and Nick Brown. It was the latter who asked the prime minister, no less, what dealings his office had had with Portland. An answer from Number Ten is still awaited.

Allan's company has also been singled out in a Commons motion put down by former government whip Fraser Kemp, deploring Portland's role in preparing propaganda leaflets for Asda in a bid to persuade its workers to sign away their union negotiating rights. A tribunal fined the supermarket giant £850,000 for its actions, describing the leaflets as "very hostile to trade unions, and highly disparaging of the process of collective bargaining".

PS: This does not appear to have bothered Blair loyalists David Blunkett and Alan Milburn who, in the latest Commons Register of Interests, admit to receiving between £5,000 and £10,000 for speeches at events organized by Portland.

GREEN WINGS?

SO MUCH for Richard Branson's green credentials and his recent idea of sticking ethanol, a kind of sugar alcohol, in his trains and planes so they run more cleanly.

It seems Beardie's past, as someone more interested in finding ingenious ways to avoid paying too much tax rather than saving the planet, is catching up with him.

As the *Australian* newspaper revealed, through a complex web of transactions dreamt up by tax avoidance experts at Ernst & Young, planes leased Down Under by airline Virgin Blue (then controlled by Branson) were bought and sold in a convoluted attempt to dodge A$70m (about £30m) in sales tax. Part of the ruse involved dodging stamp duty by flying the empty planes at dead of night to New Zealand for the paperwork to be signed. Very environmentally sound!

Sadly the Australian Taxation Office thinks the whole thing was a sham and has asked for its money back.

Down on the Farm

FROM the non-payment of English farm subsidies to its mishandling of the varroa crisis which threatens the survival of Britain's bees, Defra is every bit as incompetent as the recently exposed Home Office.

Still the most obvious disaster, however, is that facing Britain's dairy farmers as their herds fall victim to the epidemic of bovine TB spread by our exploding badger population. Thousands of farmers cannot sell their milk or animals; and 20,000 cattle a year are being slaughtered, at an annual cost of more than £100m. By 2014, according to Defra, taxpayers could be looking at a total bill of £2bn. And so prevalent now is TB in badgers that scientists wonder how long it can be before the disease infects humans.

Faced with this crisis Defra remains in a state of jelly-kneed paralysis, between two totally opposed lobbies. On one hand are Britain's increasingly desperate vets, insisting that the only way to halt this disaster is a targeted cull of sick, infectious badgers. Nearly half the country's farm vets, backed by many of our leading veterinary scientists, point out that 20 years ago, before the ban on badger-culling, TB in cattle had been all but eliminated. Culling has eliminated bovine TB in 23 of the EU's 25 countries, leaving only Britain and Ireland out in the cold. And now, after trials which yet again confirmed the efficacy of culling, the Irish are joining the rest of Europe.

On the other hand is the powerful animal rights lobby, to whom the idea of slaughtering cuddly Mr Brock is anathema. Ready at the drop of a hat to orchestrate a blizzard of protest letters to any politician or journal daring to countenance culling, the badger lobby seems to have ministers by the balls, not least the wretched "Baby Ben" Bradshaw, whose knowledge of the countryside is so great that he famously described the badger as "Britain's largest wild mammal" (to the chagrin of several million red, fallow and roe deer).

Defra's chief line of defence (or prevarication) has been to set up an Independent Scientific Group, chaired by Professor John Bourne and made up of scientists whose main qualification is their complete lack of expertise in TB. They chiefly rely for their "evidence" on the so-called "Krebs trials", studies based on trapping badgers, which appeared to show that culling would only make the problem worse, because it drives sick animals into surrounding areas, spreading the infection even more widely (Bourne calls it "perturbation" – a practice, it seems, which makes you blind).

But as the vets have now comprehensively exposed, the Krebs trials were only a pseudo-scientific charade, never designed to work. Even Defra admits that the percentage of badgers culled was sometimes as low as 20 percent. Prof Bourne has admitted in the *Veterinary Record* that his staff were not allowed into a third of the land chosen for study. Meanwhile, the tragedy rolls on: for farmers, for cattle, for taxpayers, and for all those sick badgers, condemned to a lingering death, only because humans became so blinded by sentimentality that they allowed badger numbers to explode to a level nature could no longer tolerate.

'Muckspreader'

TV

The Line of Beauty
BBC2

IT WOULD be hard to overestimate just how pleased with itself the BBC was about *The Line of Beauty*.

Namechecked by the director-general as one of the "programmes that challenge" and thus justify the rise in the licence fee, and hyped at great length on the *Today* programme, the three-part series was even one of the corporation's pilot online offerings to those who prefer their dramas jerky, pixellated and the size of a postage stamp, accompanied by invitations to viewers to send in "your 80s memories" of puffball skirts and Rubik's cubes and "quick quizzes" on the drama ("what number is the Feddens' house, 22, 29 or 36?")

Sadly, what the BBC was obviously hoping was going to be a meaningful relationship turned out to be nothing more than a quickly-forgettable bunk-up in the bushes.

Alan Hollinghurst managed to stretch out a story in which not much happens to 500 pages with a rich interior monologue, exploring the envy his hero Nick Guest feels not so much for the Cezannes, canopied beds, escritoires and rococo boiseries with which he is surrounded as much as his hosts' assuredness in their ownership. On TV this just translated into a number of sequences where the actor playing him span round looking gormless whenever he clapped eyes on anything expensive.

Still, you can hardly blame him. It *was* all very nice to look at. Bar the inexplicable Tim McInnerny (presumably cast as MP Gerald Fedden because no one at the BBC could countenance the idea of a Tory being anything other than a Lord Percy-ish buffoon), the male cast was a first XI of pretty boys, none of whom actually managed to be sexy, which they most definitely are in the original. But then this adaptation from Andrew Davies was very much a straight man's vision of gay life, as anally-fixated as a Richard Littlejohn column: while the permanently priapic Nick of the book is constantly admiring the nape of passing men's necks, their sun-tanned legs and stubbly jaws, director Saul Dibb's camera eschewed foreplay and headed inexorably arsewards. Surely someone could have taken him aside during the shaving scene in the first episode (itself a shameless lift from another tragic tale of straight-boy crushes, Anthony Minghella's film of *The Talented Mr Ripley*), and pointed out that when faced with the prospect of a nearly-naked 21-year-old, you don't bother ogling the only bit that's covered by a towel?

Still, subtlety is hardly what you're looking for from an adaptor who put Mr Darcy in a wet t-shirt contest, and Davies's sledgehammer was put to good use here; Catherine's naïve romanticising of Nick's homosexuality in the novel was transmuted into the blunt opening question "have you shagged my brother?", while the crassness of the millionaire Tippers implied by their thoughtless interruption of a game of boules at the Fedden's French holiday home was replaced by them landing a bloody great helicopter in the middle of the croquet lawn. Davies even junked the crux of the novel, the briefly-witnessed touch from which Nick deduces Gerald Fedden's affair with his secretary, in favour of him walking in on them mid-blow job – which, apart from anything else, made a nonsense of the drama's denouement, since it meant Gerald was aware that Nick knew his secret and was thus more justified in cutting him out of his family's life when it subsequently emerged.

Perhaps the most significant change, however, was that made to a very minor character. Hollinghurst devotes several pages to Nick's trip to buy drugs from a Jamaican dealer and his speculation about how he must have "a probably long and beautiful penis… twice the size of Wani, at least". Goodness! Gays are one thing, but that's one particular "challenge" the BBC's not quite ready to deal with. By the time he made it to television, the man doling out the lines of beauty was white.

'Yoof'

THE REAL & ORIGINAL DUMB BRITAIN

ONLY in Private Eye!

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: What word for an ancient Roman marketplace is also a site on the internet for open discussion?

Contestant: Chatroom.

Robinson: When the twins Romulus and Remus were abandoned in Rome, they were suckled by which four-legged creature?

Contestant: The Minotaur.

Robinson: In Italian history, in 1919 which former journalist set up the Fascist party?

Contestant: Silvio Berlusconi.

Robinson: What name rhyming with "tapper" was given to girls in the 1920s who wore fringed dresses and danced the Charleston?

Contestant: Slapper.

Beware rip-off imitations in the tabloids!

MEDIA NEWS

"THE unthinkable has happened," reports the BBC's propaganda rag *Ariel* as D-G Mark Thompson reverses his plan to transfer technical and engineering services to that well-known broadcasting company, Capita.

Back in March Thompson announced that a deal with Crapita was "a credible proposition". Now, speaking *after* having examined the company's record, Thompson has decided that a deal was not, in fact, the least bit credible.

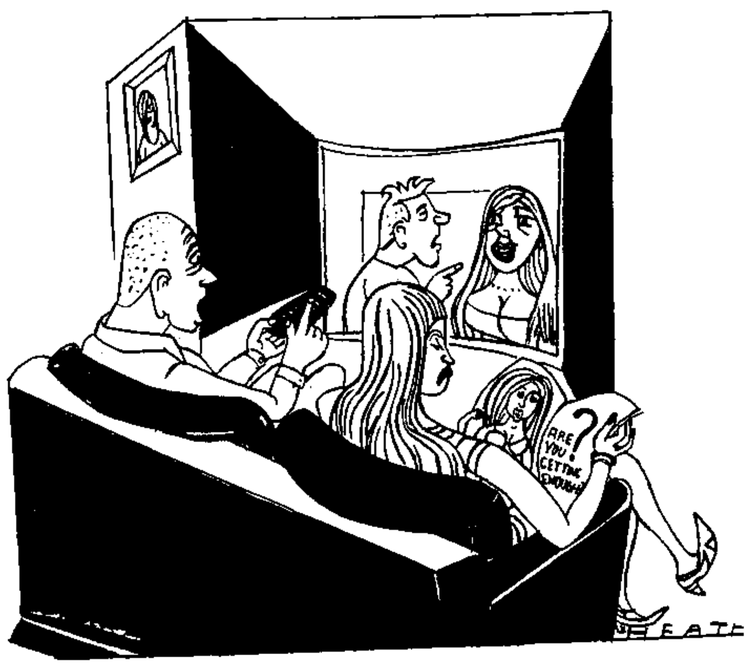
Morale in other areas of the BBC brightened. But not for long. *Ariel* concluded: "Last week's decision had no bearing on the other outsourcing contracts with Capita."

JUST FANCY THAT!

AN UNLIKELY coupling in the pages of the *Daily Express*, which on 17 May printed a lengthy missive from John Beyer of Mediawatch-UK, berating "the tide of offensive material on TV".

"Having worked alongside the late, great Mary Whitehouse CBE for many years, I can say with certainty that she would not have approved of the latest BBC drama *The Line of Beauty*," Beyer solemnly announced.

What would Mrs Whitehouse have said about what was on television that very night (and indeed every night) on *Express* proprietor Richard Desmond's pay-per-view porn channel Television X. It was offering "the hardest programmes you can see on British TV… everything from girl-on-girl cunt action to the dirtiest boy-girl fucking." Charming!



"At what point did day time television become night time television?"

Number crunching

200 ■ Number of staff the BBC is sending to Germany to cover the world cup

20 ■ Number of senior BBC executives who also find it necessary to go

LUVVIES

Tom Hanks, who plays a Harvard symbologist, Robert Langdon, said, "I view this as a great opportunity to discuss and clarify one's own place in the universe and cosmos. This is a film that can spur a better understanding to the individual. It's not a documentary. Things are not pulled up and called the facts."

Guardian

Submitted by John Clifford.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

AFTER last year's court ruling that Zimbabweans could not be deported because of the dangers they faced from the Mugabe regime, the asylum-seekers involved in the case were gradually released from detention, until last month just one woman remained locked up in Yarl's Wood.

Thando Dube, who fled persecution in Zimbabwe for being lesbian, was rapidly approaching the one-year anniversary of her detention while a dispute with the Home Office over her nationality dragged on.

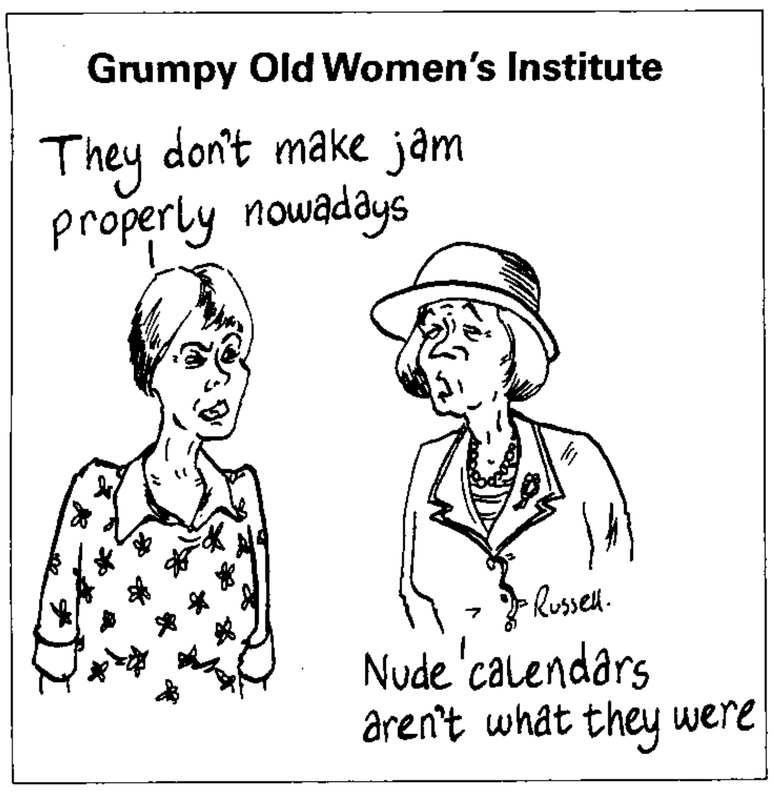
On hearing about the case, *Today* programme journalist Polly Billington called the Home Office to ask about detainees approaching a year's incarceration. The next day Billington held a long phone interview with Dube about her experiences.

By the end of the day, and before the story could be run, Dube had been released from Yarl's Wood. Coincidence, surely?

MARK OATEN's bizarre self-authored film for the BBC's *Newsnight*, which saw him strolling round Sigmund Freud's consulting room and wandering the corridors of Westminster in soft focus was, according to the programme's editor, "a rare and extraordinary insight into the pressures and temptations involved" in being a Liberal Democrat frontbencher whom no one had ever heard of.

But its presenter was not the only one allowed to be less than honest about the circumstances in which he left his job.

"I don't want a job where if you want to see your partner you have to negotiate with the whip's office," former MP Oona King told Oaten in a matey chat which concluded the item – choosing to ignore the fact that it was actually the voters of Bethnal Green and Bow who made the decision that a very unwilling Ms King should spend more time with her family.



I-SKY

"I don't know why people are grumbling about the England B performance on Thursday. I thought everyone looked very sharp. But then that could have been because I was watching the game on a High Definition-enabled television (it was the first football match to be broadcast in Britain in HD) and everything seems to look pretty sharp in the new format, even Michael Carrick on an off night."

– Giles Smith, *Times*, 27 May

"AN overwhelming 80 percent of you voted for X Men: The Last Stand over its box office rival The Da Vinci Code in my online poll yesterday. You decided the HALLE BERRY movie was miles better than TOM HANKS' effort. And having seen both, I'm inclined to agree."

– Victoria Newton delivers the 19th report on X Men III, *produced by 20th Century Fox (prop. R. Murdoch) to be printed in the* Sun *(prop. R. Murdoch) in the past month.*

AD NAUSEAM

ADLAND has been abuzz with anticipation to see what BBH, British Airways' new agency, would produce after BA put its £60m account out to tender last year (*Eye* 1143). Now that the first ads have arrived, suits at M&C Saatchi, the agency that had the account for nearly 20 years, can be forgiven a quiet chuckle. Or a loud one.

The new effort, "Cloud", centres on a plane surrounded by clouds. The clouds morph in to dolphins and one of the dolphins then invades the cabin. So far, so silly. But the big embarrassment is the choice of music: a cover version of John Denver's "I'm Leaving on a Jet Plane".

The song probably seemed a good idea to BBH's creative wags, but did they do their research? Not only do the lyrics of the melancholy original not inspire confidence ("Cause I'm leaving on a jet plane, Don't know when I'll be back again" and "Already I'm so lonesome I could die", etc), but Denver's own experience of flying is not one BA would wish to be associated with. The country singer died in 1997 when the plane he had left on… was flying off the coast of California, ran out of fuel, fell out of the sky and plummeted in to the sea.

No doubt BA hopes BBH will do better when its full brand campaign breaks later this year.

THE Scottish Executive has gone into battle on behalf of west coast fish farmers to complain to the Advertising Standards Authority about the latest Birds Eye TV ad.

When food critic Richard Johnson appeared in the advert to extol the virtues of the wild fish Birds Eye use in its frozen food (in comparison with factory-farmed products), the SE went into panic mode. Rhona Brankin, SE deputy environment minister, wrote to the ASA claiming the ad was "misleading and irresponsible", put Scottish jobs at risk and undermined the SE's healthy-eating campaign.

"As a government we have been working extremely hard in Scotland to promote a healthier lifestyle. It would be unfortunate, therefore, if, on the basis of this campaign, consumers were wrongly turned away from eating healthy farmed salmon," she wrote.

In the advert Johnson explains that Birds Eye wild Pacific salmon are naturally pink because of the food they eat at sea. The ad then cuts to a laboratory where a chemical is shown which is fed to farm salmon to turn its flesh pink artificially.

Asthaxanthin occurs naturally in the sea, but caged fish, which are a muddy grey, have to receive theirs during the manufacturing process. Fish farmers claim their asthaxanthin is natural and so causes no health risk when added to farmed salmon.

Although US and Canadian fishery scientists say Scottish farm salmon is so contaminated with PCBs and dioxins it is only fit to be eaten four times a year, the SE insists that Scottish farmed fish are "healthy".

Contact us if you have had any of these:

- **Heart Attack**
- **Fatal Heart Attack**
- **Stroke**
- **Arythmia**

Quantum Claims advertisement

WEATHER FORECASTING

ON THE day John "The Enforcer" Reid was telling the *Mirror* he'd kick the Home Office into shape, a case of rank incompetence was coming to light in his previous department, the Ministry of Defence.

The MoD retains responsibility for the Met Office, which in 2001 launched WeatherXchange, a joint venture with Umbrella Brokers and Australian mining firm BHP Bilton. The idea was simple: the Met Office would provide its expertise in weather forecasting which Umbrella would then package and sell online, via WeatherXchange, as derivatives to the international markets, allowing companies to protect themselves against – and profit from – bad weather. "As global weather conditions grow increasingly extreme, weather derivatives will serve a significant need in the business community," Met Office chief executive Peter Ewins proudly announced.

On 23 May, Ewins was called before the defence select committee to explain why the venture had gone into receivership last year. Asked by Lib Dem MP Mike Hancock how much the MoD initially authorised the Met Office to invest in the venture, Ewins said it was £1.5m. And the private sector partners? "They did not put anything into the pot," he admitted, except "the credibility to operate in the market". Labour MP Kevan Jones could scarcely believe what he was hearing: "That sounds incredibly naive, if not amateurish. If you had done that in local government, frankly, you would have been shot."

In 2003 Ewins left the Met Office and became chairman of WeatherXchange. The usual guidelines concerning civil servants leaving Whitehall to take up positions in the private sector were waived. Within two years of its launch, and despite the "credibility" of its venture partners, WeatherXchange was failing to deliver the predicted returns. Instead of either ditching WeatherXchange or investing more in it, the Met Office decided to bypass it altogether and sell its information direct to the financial markets.

Mike Hancock was understandably baffled that the Met should have been undermining the very initiative it had launched. "Would you not think that the Met Office would not only have a problem with the psyche of doing that but would also have a problem in getting partners, having signed up with one lot of partners and then stabbed them in the back by going down another line?" he asked.

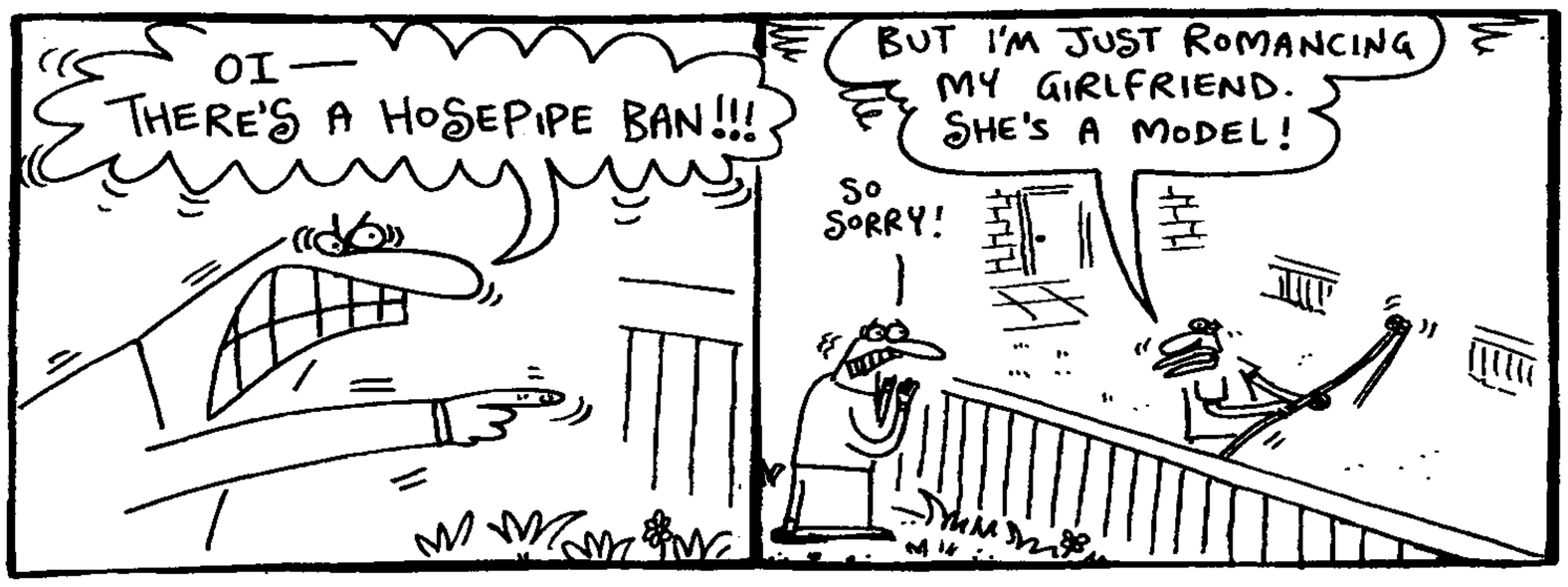
"My answer to you is, yes," Ewins replied. "I agree with you." By then, however, the MoD had decided that it was not so keen on joint ventures and, Ewins concluded, WeatherXchange's fate was sealed. Cost to the taxpayer? £4.5m.

Yes, she's become so famous she's now launching her own perfume...

...and it stinks

SUPERMODELS

KERBER



DOING THE ROUNDS

Medicine balls

THE exhortation of 13 senior consultants that the NHS should desist from funding unproven alternative therapies (*Times*, 23 May) was a touch biased given that many conventional treatments are also of dubious benefit.

According to Clinical Evidence (www.clinicalevidence.com), only 15 percent of the thousands of treatments they have reviewed have been proven to be beneficial. A further 23 percent are likely to be beneficial, 7 percent are a trade-off between benefit and harm, 5 percent are unlikely to be beneficial, 4 percent are likely to be ineffective or harmful and a whopping 46 percent are of "unknown effectiveness." Clearly, much more research needs to be funded before the NHS can claim to be evidence-based.

Surgery is impossible to subject to the gold standard "double-blind randomised controlled trial" since any surgeon worth his salt knows if he is performing a proper or sham operation. But the placebo effect is just as evident in surgery as it is in homeopathy. Patients with osteoarthritis who are tricked into thinking their knee joint has been washed out and the bits removed have as much pain reduction and improved movement as those who've had proper arthroscopy.[1] For decades, orthopaedic surgeons have earned a fortune just by blowing air into joints.

There is no doubt that the vast majority of complimentary therapies also operate on the placebo effect. In the few trials where acupuncture or homeopathy have been shown to work, it doesn't much matter what remedy you give or where you stick the needles. What matters is the strength of the relationship between therapist and client, and the belief, expectation and suggestion that goes with it. One reason it costs drug companies nearly $1bn to get a new drug to market is the great difficulty many of them have in out-performing a placebo.

Placebos produce noticeable improvements across a whole range of symptoms and illnesses, such as pain, tiredness, nausea, high blood pressure, angina, asthma, hay fever, headaches, PMT, depression, anxiety, peptic ulcers, high cholesterol, insomnia, hot flushes and social problems. They can reduce the frequency of epileptic seizures, have nasty side effects and reverse the effects of powerful drugs. Placebos even work if you tell patients that's what they're taking. In one study[2], 15 psychiatric patients suffering from neurotic symptoms were told: "We feel that a so-called sugar pill may help you. Do you know what a sugar pill is? A sugar pill is a pill with no medicine in it at all. I think this pill will help you as it has helped so many others. Are you willing to try this pill?" Fourteen said yes, 13 improved during the week, some a great deal including one previously suicidal patient.

All medicine is in large part placebo, yet some doctors are jealous of the complementary therapists' freedom to "big up" their placebo effect by talking unscientific bollocks. But far from wasting money, complementary therapy does in many cases save it by avoiding the prescription of far more expensive, and potentially harmful, drugs.

In a free at the front door health service, patients flood in with all manner of bizarre symptoms and emotional hang-ups that science has yet to find an answer for. Without complementary therapy, patients end up on Prozac or painkillers just to get them out of the door.

The only other alternative is counselling, which has some evidence-base but it's used by GPs to pass the buck. As Dr Phil Peverley puts it: "Our referral letters essentially say the same thing. 'Dear counsellor, I don't want to talk to this patient any more. You do it.'... Our counsellor was a proper nurse until three months ago, but she is now trained to listen to any old shite without laughing."[3] Alas, M.D. can't practise complementary therapy without laughing ("you've got too much jitsu in your tsubo...") but I know plenty of people who can. The NHS would implode without them.

[1] Moseley et al. *New England Journal of Medicine* 2002; 347:81-88

[2] Park L Covi L Non blind Placebo Trial *Archives of General Psychiatry* 1965 12 336-45

3 Peverley, *Pulse Magazine*, 1 June 2006

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

GOOD NEWS, WE'VE FOUND YOUR LOST RECORDS...
THEY'RE MY FATHER'S
OH WELL, AT LEAST WE'RE UP TO SPEED ON THE HEREDITARY CONDITIONS
PID

SIGNAL FAILURES

Take a Bowker

WHEN Richard Bowker, former head of the scrapped Strategic Rail Authority, was put in charge of the government's £45bn school building programme last August as chief executive of Partnerships for Schools (PfS), he emphasised his commitment to public service.

"I still feel there is a bit of unfinished business for me there. I am a passionate believer in the intelligent public sector client," he drooled. "What's fantastic about this job is that it isn't just about delivering bricks and mortar through PFI; it's about delivering improved performance in our schools so that kids do better."

Alas, an unproductive eight months into the job (no deal has been signed), Bowker's passion for public service has died and he's off to take over at National Express Group (NEG) on a reported seven-figure deal (private bus companies having been the big winners from recent rail policy).

Not that Bowker has done too badly out of the taxpayer, either. He received a £300,000 pay-off from the SRA before quickly joining PfS on £200,000 plus a first year bonus of £50,000, most of which, PfS confirmed, he has been paid -- despite being with them for about five minutes.

SO what did Bowker put on his CV when he applied for the National Express job? The NEG press release on 24 May announcing his appointment said that while at the helm of the SRA he had "led the UK rail industry through the successful delivery of the multi-billion pound West Coast main line route modernisation".

On 23 May Transport Secretary Douglas Alexander wrote in a "progress report" on the project: "Much complex work remains to be done for the end of 2008." Passengers on the Crewe to Stockport part of the mainline might also disagree with the verdict of "successful delivery", having endured replacement buses since December.

BOWKER's new job at National Express confirms a wallet-warming trend in the rail industry, which is now so complicated that former officials command huge fees and salaries for sharing their expertise with private firms desperate to understand how the system works.

National Express, recently relegated to second-biggest train operator after losing territory and failing to win new franchises, will reportedly pay Bowker £1m a year. But some of the people he appointed to the SRA aren't doing badly either (although the SRA was so crap it was abolished after four years). They include transport consultant Jim Steer (*Eye* 1146) and Nicola Shaw, who hopped from American consultancy firm Bechtel to the SRA to FirstGroup (*Eye* 1150).

Tom Winsor, rail regulator until 2004, has unparalleled insight into the rail labyrinth because he helped create it when a law firm seconded him to be chief legal adviser to the first rail regulator in 1993. Later he advised Virgin Trains how to exploit that structure, then became rail regulator himself. Now he's advising Fraser Eagle, backer of rookie firm Grand Central. "He isn't cheap," Fraser Eagle boss Kevin Dean told *Transit* magazine. But apparently he's worth it: Grand Central's original proposal was blocked by Winsor as regulator but its revised plans have sailed through the office of rail regulation, despite objections from GNER and the government.

Connex snapped up former franchising director John O'Brien in 2003 to chair its UK train and bus firms. He kept the job even though Connex soon had no UK trains or buses. Now Connex (renamed Veolia) is clawing its way back, buying obscure bus firms, and O'Brien reckons it will return to the rail industry.

'Dr B Ching'

THE COMMUTERS
THERE'S BEEN AN INCREASE IN RAIL TRAVEL
...THIS IS THE THIRD TIME WE'VE HAD TO WALK ALONG THIS ONE
MIND HOW YOU GO...
Snizelder

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

KOPS AND ROBIN

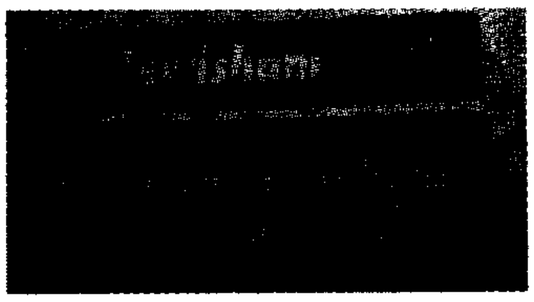
MORE NEWS of Newham mayor Sir Robin Wales's private police force – the so-called parks constabulary who patrol the borough in uniforms and vehicles indistinguishable from those of genuine policemen, but without any of the qualifications or training required by Knacker (*see Eye* 1143).

On 14 April two youths, aged 17 and 14, were crossing Aldersbrook Road in East London when a large unmarked van cut across their path. The older boy gave the van "the finger" and shouted "fuck off", whereupon it screeched to a halt and six men in police-type uniforms piled out. Both youths were bundled into the back and searched. At this point the "officers" discovered that the younger youth was wearing an electronic tag. Excitedly they radioed the Met for advice. As the boys had not committed any offence, Knacker's advice was to tell them to mind their language and let them go.

It could be argued, and is by Mayor Wales, that the parks police play a valuable role in preventing antisocial behaviour in the borough and freeing up the real Knacker to fight crime. Alas, as an independent report pointed out last year, this cannot be achieved by an ill-disciplined, ill-trained gang masquerading as policemen. Especially as the latest incident did not take place in Newham at all, but several hundred yards inside neighbouring Redbridge.

Some might take the view that what happened was, in fact, an unlawful abduction.

PS: Our earlier story reported allegations that some of the more gung-ho members of the Keystone Kops had taken to illegally carrying handcuffs and batons. They have now taken a further step into fantasyland by discarding their white shirts – which made them look like ordinary Met constables – in favour of navy blue ones, as worn by tactical support units and firearms officers.



I-SPY

Stairwell, Deptford flats, London.

● HAVING lost two Conservative council leaders in three years, with one sent to prison and the other barred from public office, Lincolnshire Tories have taken steps to ensure nothing of the sort happens again. By making council business more open to public scrutiny and debate? Er, no. Instead, they have abolished councillors' rights to receive detailed written answers to any question at council meetings, replacing the system with a limited number of oral questions. It was as a result of a question from Labour group leader Rob Parker in 2001 that the then council leader Jim Speechley admitted owning land near the route of a proposed bypass that could have made him a fortune (*Eyes passim*). He ended up in prison. As Lincolnshire Tories say: never again!

GUSSIE ON THE GO

MEMBERS of Shetland Islands council have been busy clocking up the air miles. Last year, their worldwide roaming accounted for more than £100,000 of a record-breaking £535,103 in expenses and allowances.

The grand total was twenty grand more than the previous year and especially impressive given that the council had had a bollocking from Audit Scotland for failing to balance its books for the third year in a row.

One councillor, Lib-Dem Leslie "Gussie" Angus, spent a whole month out of the country in the course of five separate jaunts to meetings of something called the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), a talking shop which enables public servants from EU countries to listen to high-grade Eurowaffle in agreeable surroundings.

Cllr Angus spent a week boning up on peripheral maritime matters on the Caribbean island of Martinique, followed later by a week on Madeira. Accompanied by Independent councillor Joseph "Josie" Simpson he spent a week in Crete, three days on the Baltic island of Gotland and four days in Brittany. However, Gussie left Josie to go it alone at a four-day CPMR meeting in chilly Bergen, Norway.

Other SIC councillors were no less footloose. Independent councillor Iris Hawkins made three trips, totalling 16 days, to conferences in Slovenia, Paris and Madrid, to hear about the latest developments in nuclear waste management – a subject of vital interest to Shetland's crofters.

Cllr Brian Gregson, meanwhile, spent 18 days at environmental conferences, including six days in New York, according to the *Shetland Times*, "to attend talks at the United Nations on nuclear non-proliferation". As the *Eye* went to press we were unable to confirm reports that Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was having second thoughts about building the Bomb as a result.

● TORY-run Kent County Council also knows a thing or two about air travel having made a disastrous investment in EUjet, the short-lived low-cost airline which went bust last year. Based at the former Battle of Britain airfield, Manston, now amusingly renamed "Kent International Airport", it received £100,000 (equivalent to a 1.5 percent stake) from the county council, thanks in large part to former cabinet member for regeneration, Alex King.

King was not only instrumental in the initial investment but was happy to see a further €15,000 cast down the drain when EUjet got into trouble. The justification for throwing good money after bad was that the airline would go bust straight away unless it got the extra money from Kent. As if £10,000 was going to make any difference either way.

Both decisions were taken against the strong opposition of officers. Yet King came in for no criticism from the Tory-dominated scrutiny committee after the carrier went bust. Indeed, with such an enviable record, Tories recently promoted King to deputy leader of the council!

"What odds are you giving on a supercasino coming to town?"

CARLISLE BE DAMNED

CRAPITA'S "strategic partnership" with Tory/Lib-Dem Cumbria County Council, signed in 2001, was supposed to achieve great things.

The council's design and business services department had been so successful in winning outside work that it was reaching the legal limit of what it could do as a public body. Capita would take on and grow the business; the council would get better services and 1,000 new jobs would be created by January 2006. As an extra incentive, for every job short of the 1,000 target, Crapita would repay £1,000 to the taxpayer.

Alas, by the end of 2005, Capita could claim credit for just 219 new jobs. Locals were disappointed, but at least they would be getting £781,000 to spend on council services.

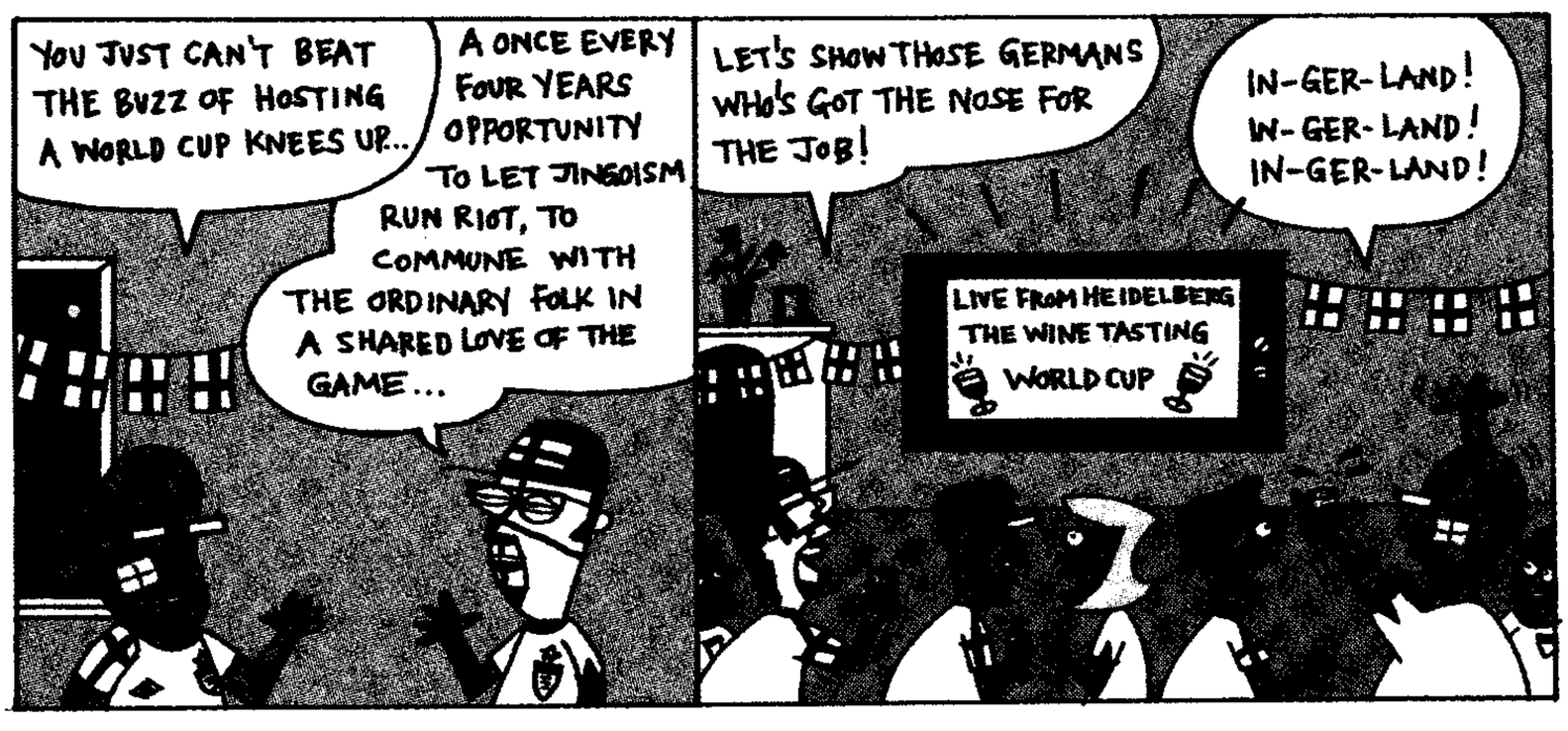
Wrong! Cumbria has extended Crapita's contract until 2011, and given it until 2009 to reach the jobs target, with no penalty in the meantime.

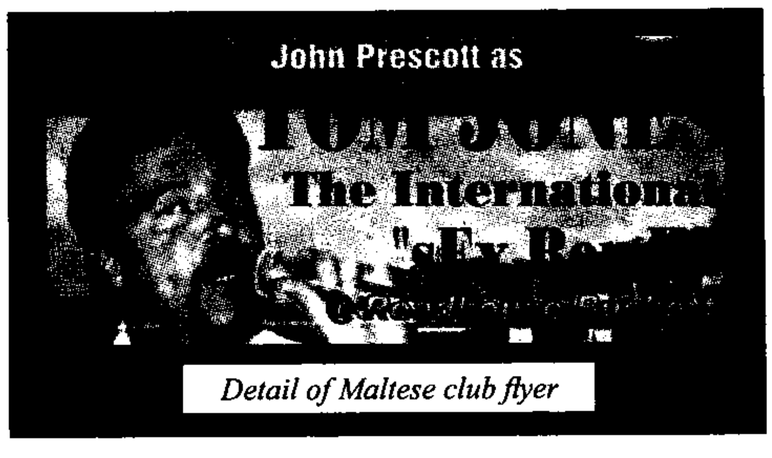
Free council rag *YourCumbria* [*sic*] proclaimed that "Capita – a successful local and national employer – has recently won a three-year extension to its Strategic Partnership with Cumbria County Council and is looking to the future with confidence."

● SUNDERLAND Labour councillor Dave Allan (*Eyes passim*) has been boasting to pals that he is going to get off the hook over allegations that he pocketed the subscriptions of union members. For one thing, regional Amicus secretary Davey Hall is his big mate. For another, he has been telling investigators that he "lost" the money while having a nervous breakdown. This has puzzled fellow party members because, whatever else may be said about Cllr Allan, he has always had an excellent attendance record at council and Labour group meetings, with never a hint of mental disturbance. You just never know, do you?

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER


YOU JUST CAN'T BEAT THE BUZZ OF HOSTING A WORLD CUP KNEES UP...
A ONCE EVERY FOUR YEARS OPPORTUNITY TO LET JINGOISM RUN RIOT, TO COMMUNE WITH THE ORDINARY FOLK IN A SHARED LOVE OF THE GAME...
LET'S SHOW THOSE GERMANS WHO'S GOT THE NOSE FOR THE JOB!
IN-GER-LAND! IN-GER-LAND! IN-GER-LAND!
LIVE FROM HEIDELBERG THE WINE TASTING WORLD CUP



Detail of Maltese club flyer

NOOKS and CORNERS

FURTHER proof the New Labour government is the most aggressively Philistine since Macmillan's came with the leaking of the letter from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office to Ruth Kelly, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Dated 22 May, it concerned the introduction of legislation to enable demolition of the listed Commonwealth Institute in Kensington to enable the Institute "to achieve maximum potential value from the sale of their property in Kensington." The letter was signed by the ineffable Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media 'n' Sport, and the Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett.

The purpose-built Commonwealth Institute is a remarkable piece of architecture. Designed by Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall & Partners and built in 1960-62, it replaced the old Imperial Institute and was intended as a flexible exhibition venue for educational purposes. The building is memorable for its dominating hyperbolic-paraboloid roof – like that of the Sydney Opera House – made of shell concrete and covered in copper: just the sort of "exciting" shape we are invited to admire in the contemporary work of, say, Frank Gehry or Zaha Hadid.

It was listed back in 1988 at grade II*. But this has always been a problematic building. The roof has leaked, and it is now empty. Attempts have been made to de-list it, but its architectural importance is absolutely clear, and last year Ms Jowell's department rejected an application to demolish.

Now the secretary of state is not only failing in her duty to protect the nation's historic built environment, but seems to fail to understand the status of listed buildings altogether. Listing is not (and was never intended to be) an absolute guarantee of preservation but an index of architectural and/or historical importance, allowing informed consideration before demolition or alteration is permitted by the local authority or the DCMS.

There is a case for demolishing the Commonwealth Institute because of its structural and functional problems if an alternative use cannot be found by placing it in the open market, and the statutorily established forum for making this case is, of course, the public inquiry, which the secretary of state can call for. But that is not good enough for Jowell and Beckett as the inspector's decision might go against them: "The Trustees of the Institute are unwilling to rely exclusively on this procedure because the unique conditions that arise in this case cannot be taken into account by the [Local Planning Authority]."

So, because ministers can't get their own way by traditional democratic means, they simply introduce new laws to get what they want. Although de-listing the Commonwealth Institute has already been rejected, Jowell and Beckett propose that it should be de-listed "through primary legislation… a short Bill, which would be likely to be hybrid and which would attract some controversy from petitioners which we would need to be ready to manage." I like that "manage", for controversy there certainly already is.

The bogus argument for this legislation is that the Commonwealth Institute is a charity, whose beneficiaries are the Commonwealth countries, and that its educational priorities can only be pursued by achieving "substantially greater value" from the Kensington property. If such a bill were passed, no listed historic building owned by a charity – no almshouse, school or college, for example – would be safe as the trustees could argue that their aims require the profitable commercial development of their tiresome old buildings. The whole purpose of our historic building legislation would be undermined.

Happily this nefarious plan has elicited a robust reaction from English Heritage, the statutory adviser on historic buildings. Simon Thurley, chief executive, has stated: "This proposal to alter the law in order to make de-listing the Commonwealth Institute possible is not only muddled and dangerous but completely unnecessary. Historically priceless buildings occupying valuable sites everywhere would be at risk from demolition if it could be shown that maximum profit could be achieved for any good cause." Quite so.

SOMEONE who would welcome Jowell & Beckett's new law is Peter Sotheran JP, chairman of the trustees of Kirkleatham Hospital near Redcar.

With St Cuthbert's Church, the Turner Mausoleum and the former Free Grammar School in addition to the Hospital almshouses – all endowed by Sir William Turner, Lord Mayor of London in 1668 – Kirkleatham has one of the finest groups of historic Classical buildings in England. The Hospital was largely rebuilt by Cholmley Turner after 1741 – possibly to the design of James Gibbs – and it has, in the centre, a most beautiful small chapel. Until recently, a pair of elaborate gilded and upholstered chairs sat either side of the communion table. Today, however, thanks to Mr Sotheran they are up for sale at Christie's in London. Now this local worthy wants to flog the "gilt wood chandelier of great splendour" which was given in 1747. As this costs £2,500 a year to insure, he considers the money would be better spent on the purposes of the almshouses, but as the chandelier is a "fixture", listed building consent is required – unless Ms Jowell can oblige with some enabling legislation.

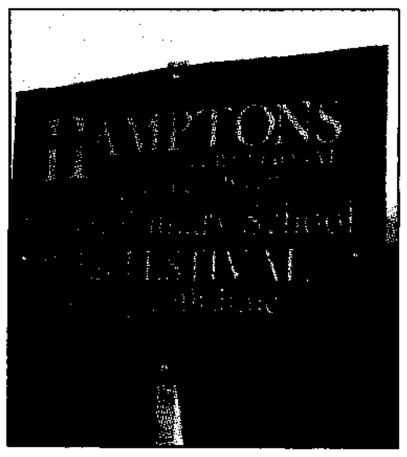
That such beautiful things were given to Kirkleatham for the occupants of the almshouses to enjoy is of course beside the point. Money in the bank is the thing.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Forget that rubbish—there's a lovely minimalist homage to Rachel Whiteread's hidden spaces within everyday objects.
WORLD SAND SCULPTURE FESTIVAL—BRIGHTON



I-SPY

Bentley, Hants

Submitted by Simon Caddy.

£10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THERE was a time, admittedly a long while ago, when the crown was a serious patron of the arts, bestowing largesse on musicians who caught the royal ear and supporting the young and worthy. How times have changed.

Far from supporting young musicians, the crown is these days bent on ripping them off – or so it seems from a disturbing case of financial skulduggery that amounts to what used to be called *payola* and is currently being perpetrated in the name of the royal household.

Not everybody knows that certain of the royal palaces – even the ones that still function as homes – are available for hire to commercial organisations. One of these is Kensington Palace which, a few weeks ago, was hired by a bank for some festive function. The bank also hired a young and worthy string quartet to play at the function. But then, mysteriously, the quartet was told it had been *un*-hired – on the grounds that it was not "approved" by the palace.

Justifiably aggrieved, the leader of the quartet emailed the palace to find out what was going on. There was no reply. He then rang – only to be told no one was available to speak but he could leave a message. Ominously, in the course of that exchange he was informed that "we generally only work with people who bring us business".

After several days he did finally manage to speak with a lady who called herself the palace's "commercial manager" and was bizarrely evasive, waffling at length about approved lists of suppliers, security checks, the need to send in proposals, proposals being only assessed once a year...

But hang on a minute, said the quartet-leader smelling several rats: we're just four young musicians booked for a reception. What exactly are you saying here? Then at last the "commercial manager" came clean. To play in the palace, the quartet would have to be an approved supplier. To be an approved supplier it would have to sign an agreement to give the palace a 10 percent kickback on whatever it was paid by the bank. Oh, and what's more, as the quartet was young, little known, and not being paid much, that 10 percent wouldn't be enough to interest the palace – "uneconomic" was the word used – so it wouldn't be prepared to put the quartet on the approved suppliers list in any event.

Instead, having exercised its veto, the palace would present the bank with an alternative quartet that agreed the payola deal and (of course) charged more for its services.

These quiet backhanders are presumably earning the royal household a fair sum, since they doubtless apply to caterers, event managers, equipment hire-companies and the like too. Whatever the ethics of the arrangement, you might not shed many tears for these kinds of business organisation that fall victim to it. But for the royal household to leech on the earnings of struggling classical musicians, and to block the booking of four young ones on the grounds that it won't be able to leech quite enough, is disgraceful.

As President of the Royal College of Music and patron of heaven-knows how many musical bodies, including the London String Quartet Foundation, one can only presume Prince Charles doesn't know what's happening in his name… and that when he finds out, he'll think it really is appalling and put a stop to it.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Letters

Nuclear discord

Sir,

Very amusing cover of the unmusical mutant Finns (Eye 1159) but, just to be pedantic, according to the UN Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) the number of genetic abnormalities/congenital birth defects resulting from Chernobyl = 0; from Hiroshima = 0; from Nagasaki = 0.*

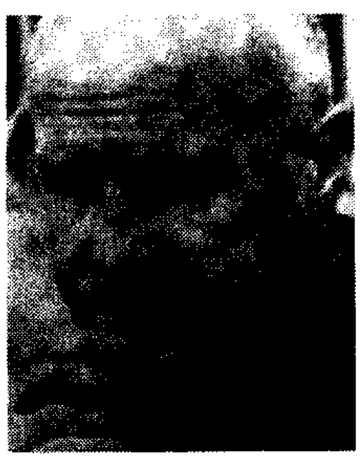
Lovely, cuddly, warm and fuzzy nuclear power has enough bad press without being blamed for the Eurovision Song Contest.

*(*Of course UNSCEAR is a branch of the Yankee-imperialist-loving United Nations so might be lying.)*

DR ROB JOHNSTON,

Northampton.

Lookalike



Reid

Genet

Sir,

Has anyone noticed the resemblance between New Labour's Glaswegian hard man John "fit for purpose" Reid and the gay French novelist and playwright Jean Genet? Reid would no doubt have the jailbird Genet out of the country on the first available Eurostar.

Yours,
ADRIAN TAHOURDIN,

London SW18.

Private Eid?

Sir,

Congratulations on your trenchant cartoon (Eye 1159) attacking Hollywood's pusillanimity. A blockbusting film entitled "The Mohammed Code" is indeed inconceivable. Perhaps you could make this the basis for a series. Other "Scenes You Won't See" could include a satirical magazine printing a spoof cover for Eid ul-Fitr or some Danish cartoons depicting the Prophet.

Yours in mild disappointment,
C.N. CAMPBELL,

Via email.

Dagenham dialogue

Sir,

I have to correct an error by Geof Collyer in the last issue, which is also prevalent in the press, that the BNP won seats in Barking at the last local elections. They did NOT. ALL the wards in which they won their 11 council seats in Barking and Dagenham (Alibon, Goresbrook, Mayesbrook, Valence and Village) are in white, working-class Dagenham, not multi-racial Barking, which remains 100 percent Labour in its five wards. The BNP may be barking, but Barking isn't!

Yours,
KEN STRONG,

Hornchurch.

Trams v. buses

Sir,

Difficult to believe there are still those who argue the case for buses in town centres. Reader John Barkess (Eye 1159) maintains... "the superiority of buses", "benefit/cost ratio" and that trams are... "strategically and financially rubbish". Whose benefit and whose cost?

I wonder at the motives of such people who would sooner have their city centres continue being blighted by the stinking pollution and noise of these unjustifiable and outmoded vehicles. They are motorized reminders of the greed and opportunism – at the cost of everyone else in towns and cities – under deregulation.

Any notional study of the benefit/cost ratio should be a clear-cut indicator of the superiority of trams – this being the opinion held by those who merely want the best for their cities, ie the citizens. Of course, it will always be in direct contrast to the views held by those committers of highway robbery, the corporate investors and their cheerleading co-conspirators and cronies; in civic authorities, in governmental departments, and on the pages of the press.

Yours faithfully,
PETER WILK,

Bristol.

More hot air

Sir,

Re carbon dioxide emissions (In The Back, 1155; David Brown's letter, 1159): aircraft also emit water vapour and nitrogen oxides, both of which contribute to the greenhouse effect. And at high altitudes, nitrogen oxides further deplete the ozone layer – this may become more significant as we develop one-stop supersonic flights between the west and the growing economies of the Far East and Australasia.

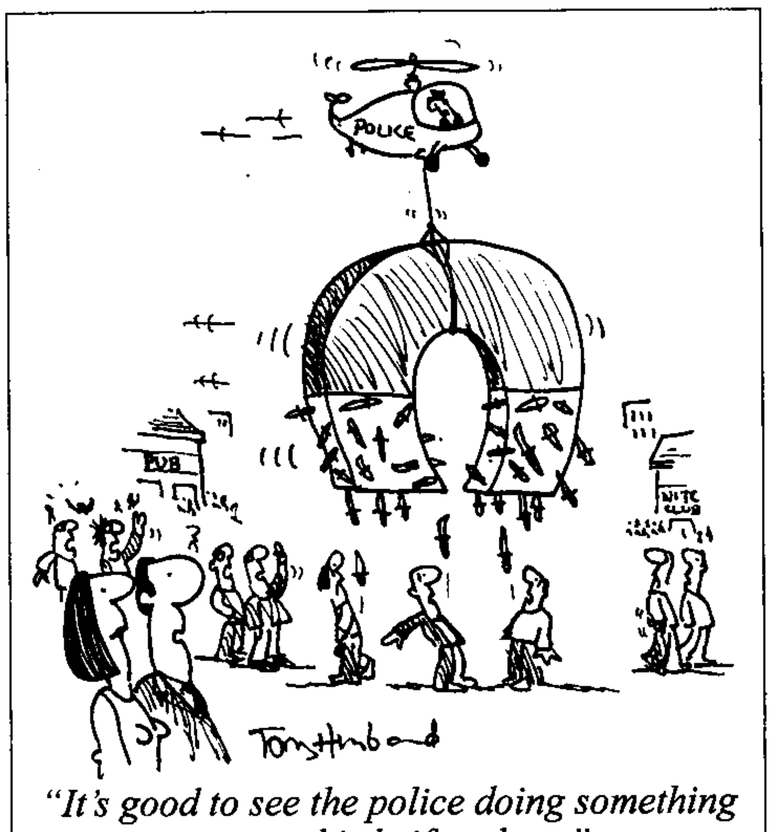
As to surface travel, re-regulating buses would help. Per passenger per kilometre, buses emit 30 percent less CO_2 than cars. If we could persuade more people to use buses, then the fare prices, the departure frequencies, and the social mix and behaviour on board would improve: all would further encourage usage. Until then we need strong incentives to get back on and, although we must beware an ever-mightier state, here is an area where its intervention could be useful.

Closer to home, UK houses account for 28 percent of national carbon dioxide emissions; 57 percent of this is simply heating the dwelling space, a further 25 percent for heating water. Government initiatives, such as heat-as-you-need condensing boilers may be nannyish, but are working on the 23 percent of total CO_2 emissions that we can most easily reduce.

Thick jumpers, buses, colder houses – don't you miss the 1970s?

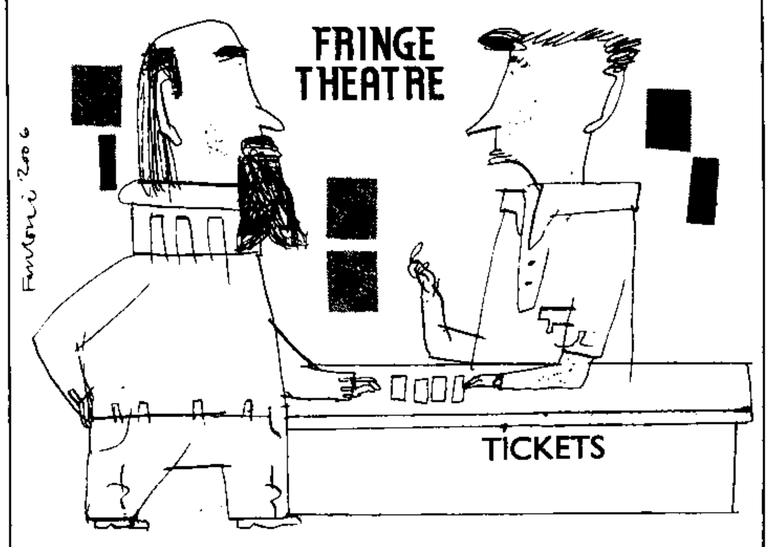
Best wishes,
ROLF NORFOLK,

Birmingham.



"It's good to see the police doing something to stop this knife culture"

Scenes You Seldom See



"Someone's booked who isn't a friend"

Waste of space?

Sir,

As a long-time reader I have never been so tempted to feed my copy of the Eye into a shredder as I have reading "Muckspreader" in issue 1159.

For years farmers have done well out of their exemption from the "controlled waste" category. While every other business in the country has had the burdens he describes in his article, farmers have laughed and laughed. In fact, a neat little sideline could be exploited legitimately by land-spreading "beneficial to agriculture" putrescible wastes (causing a stink with local residents), and not-so-legitimately by accepting external waste to their "tips".

The fact that these "tips" were not subject to the same containment controls as conventional landfills seems to escape him. Lack of containment of resulting leachate can lead to pollution of underlying water sources from the decomposing remains of these "potato peelings". I find his attitude to asbestos similarly contemptible. Like everyone else, farmers have responsibilities under the "Control of Asbestos at Work" Regulations 2002.

From my understanding farmers now receive a portion of their subsidies based on "protection of the environment". If this is so, perhaps it is time they worked to the same standards as the rest of us.

PAUL BAIN,

Barnsley, S. Yorks.

Proper Charlie

Sir,

Remote Controller's diatribe over the ITV1 screening of The Prince of Wales: Up Close misses the point. The programme was about the Prince's Trust, to mark its 30-year anniversary.

It was not designed to quiz the Prince over Diana, the government or any other "hard-hitting" stuff RC would rather have heard about. Hence we had lots of shots of Prince's Trust things including Wills and Harry getting involved, etc.

Tame stuff and rather dull admittedly, but still worth seeing from a Prince's Trust point of view. And anyway, why would Sir Trevor McDonald want to talk to Charles about Diana. She's dead, the prince has moved on and so should we, or RC can read the Express for any updates!

PAUL NORRIS,

A castle, in Devon.

Hutton dressed as flam

Sir,

Re your story on page 9 about Alastair Campbell autographing a copy of the Hutton Report, I thought he wrote it...

Best regards,
ROBERT GREEN,

Via email.

"Honestly, you're not prevented from answering by the Data Protection Act"

Screen test

Sir,

I wish to respond to your Doing The Rounds article (12 May) which mentioned our clinic Preventicum, the London Centre of Preventive Medicine.

Dr Rustam Al-Shahi's comment that the MRI brain scan was the "last thing Ms Brady needed" is at best an unwise statement. Yes, brain aneurysms are not uncommon but vary in their size, shape, position and potential to cause harm. It is widely accepted that certain aneurysms are more likely to bleed than others and the decision whether to treat these through intervention needs careful consideration of the pros and cons.

Your article is inaccurate in that Karren Brady did not have her aneurysm clipped during "five and a half hours of risky neurosurgery". As she has pointed out in her newspaper interviews, this was treated using a minimally invasive coiling technique and was not clipped as your article said. The article points out that only one in 15 aneurysms bleeds (this can only be a guess), well if you are that person then this is a catastrophic event which could result in being severely disabled or even death, depending on the location and size of the aneurysm. It is like saying that Russian roulette is not risky.

Preventicum specialises in health screening and offers the most advanced and probably safest full-body check-ups. This is not the same as full-body MRI scanning. Indeed, we have specifically designed a series of MRI scanning sequences which are safe and radiation-free, and look specifically at the brain, heart, colon and arterial system. These areas have been selected to screen in combination with our other examinations and consultations for evidence of the main killers in the UK, such as cardiovascular disease, stroke and cancers. A combination of physical exam, scanning and pathology results are viewed holistically to best advise the client and if risk factors are identified then these are also reported on.

Yours sincerely,
DR GARRY SAVIN MBBS DRCOG MRCGP,
Medical Director, Preventicum.

Lookalike

Dot

Coco

Sir,

I recently came across a photograph of Coco Chanel and was struck by how much she looks like Dot Branning (née Cotton) of "EastEnders". Are they related?

Yours,
GRAHAM RENNIE,
Glasgow.

Photo opportunity

Sir,

*I suspect A. Taslic (Eye 1159) may be only half-right. The British vice-consul at Skopje told me the full name is **Kosovo Polje** or "Field of the Black Birds" (not blackbirds!), from the crows that feasted on the Serbian dead after their rout by the Turks on 15 June 1389.*

LAWLESS BETHUNE,
Launceston.

*...As a pedant of the English bird-watching variety, I beg to point out to your recent correspondent (Eye 1159) that blackbirds are thrushes (**Turdidae**). Thus Jan Vilikovsky's English translation of **Kos** (Eye 1158) was valid if not specific.*

All this talk of grappling with the finer points of foreign birds puts me in mind of a photograph I once saw – perhaps you have something similar in your records?

Best wishes,
MICHAEL PERRY,
Via email.

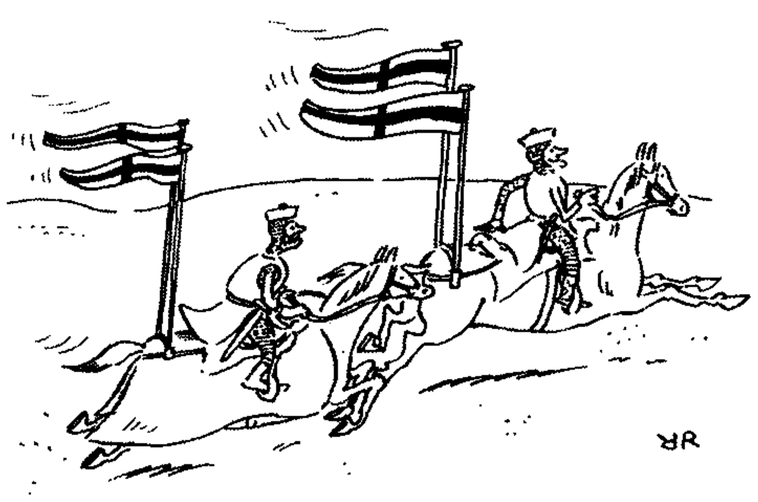
The future's Animal shaped

Sir,

With regards to your 26 May edition of Ad Nauseam, despite inaccurate reports in the marketing press, Orange is not dropping its highly successful Animals campaign in favour of a new brand campaign. The Animals campaign will continue throughout 2006 as planned.

Regards,
STUART JACKSON,
Head of UK Media Relations, Orange.

World Cup 1095



Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"You just can't hypothesise about something that may or may not happen."
RODNEY MARSH
(Paul Halfpenny)

"Mary Magdalene... was perhaps married to Jesus Christ and fathered a child with him."
NIGEL FLOYD, BBC World Service
(Martin Hackett)

"... the player who stood out for me, who didn't even play, was Carrick."
LEE DIXON, BBC1
(Lewys Ball)

"Words can't say what I mean."
CHANTELLE
(Jim Twemlow)

"Five minutes to go and England have a winning lead..."
JOHN MOTSON, BBC1
(Matt Phillips)

SOLUTIONS

"Harlow College offers solutions for improved company performance; Fresh solutions for workplace challenges" – *management training*

"Storage Solutions for your space" – *coat hangers*

"Dow Corning: Innovative Solutions for Wound Management" – *bandages*

"Distinctive Garden Solutions" – *gardening gloves*

"Doggie Solutions" – *collars*

"Israel Military Industries Ltd: Urban Warfare Solutions" – *guns*

All submitted by readers

Cornish pasting

Sir,

Your piece complaining about the £600,000 of taxpayers' money being spent on developing the Cornish language, (Brussels Sprouts, Eye 1159), might have been spent on teaching Cornish children about their own culture over the years (a sum not unadjacent to zero), and how much Cornish taxpayers have had to fork out to fund the indoctrination of their own children in a foreign culture.

Oll an gwella,
BRENDAN MCMAHON,
Derbyshire.

In September 1999, more than 600 guinea pigs were "liberated" in a raid.

The activists conducted painstaking research – helped by a mole at the DVLA

Grauniad

Dogg has his day

Sir,

Is Simeon D. Berends (Eye 1159) really as "down" as he purports to be? If so, he would have known that Tim Westwood's mention of "ATL" refers to the city of Atlanta, and not to the phrase (or indeed the West Coast rap outfit) "Above The Law".

His translation of "Shottas" as "a ghetto drama" is also erroneous. It is, in fact, a general term for gangsters in the Jamaican dancehall DJ vernacular. To quote a recent lyric by Vybz Kartel: "Di gal dem want shotta, dem na want Harry Potter."

It makes me wonder if Mr Berends really does know whatta gwan inna di ghetto.

Yours accurately,
MR S.D. DOGG,
Via email.

Shagged out

Sir,

I wonder if Simon Cassini (Letters, Eye 1159) has stopped sniggering at the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons yet?

If so, perhaps reading about Eastbourne NHS Trust's new Sexual Health Action Group would cheer him up. Fnarr, fnarr, yip yip, etc. etc.

Yours in immaturity,
GARETH PRICE,
Via email.

Letter from **Phnom Penh**

from Our Own Correspondent

FOX HUNTING is now all the rage in the pastures and woodland of Cambodia, our tiny, war-ravaged nation which is preparing for next year's long-awaited genocide trial of the Khmer Rouge leaders while still managing to be one of the world's hottest holiday destinations.

The hunting horn is sounding for a wily kind of fox, however; our strongman Prime Minister Hun Sen having been busy flushing out government officials' mistresses, blasting them "evil foxes". John Prescott take note.

These vixens, usually actresses or karaoke singers, are wielding too much influence in political appointments, says the PM, who wants to introduce a law to prosecute gallivanting government officials. The officials' woes worsened when the PM also announced plans for an investigation into how mistresses got their spending money.

As the hunt gathered pace, there were those who recalled allegations that the Prime Minister, a former Khmer Rouge foot solider, himself had an affair with actress Piseth Pilika: a charge Hun Sen denied. The French weekly *L'Express* exposed the alleged romance in 1999 after publishing references to it from the actress's diary following her death. Pilika was gunned down in a market in a crime that has not been solved.

Many also wondered what lay behind this new campaign for morality in a country where taking a mistress or making regular visits to a prostitute is as common as, well, brokering political appointments for family and friends. The true motive soon became apparent – especially for the married Prince Norodom Ranariddh, leader of FUNCINPEC, Cambodia's royalist party, when the media began reporting his involvement with a young actress and another relationship with a classical dancer. As the prince, also head of Cambodia's lower house, the National Assembly, came under attack, the prime minister posed in loving photographs with his wife of 30 years, Bun Rany. In one picture he pecked her on the cheek and in another he presented her with a bouquet of flowers. The message was clear.

The damage inflicted on the prince's reputation was part of a grander plan to strengthen the prime minister's power. In the first week of March, our parliament approved changes to the constitution that reduced the number of lawmakers required to form a government from two thirds to 50 percent-plus-one. This eliminated the need for a coalition, which had existed between Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party and FUNCINPEC, on and off, since the UN-supervised elections in 1993.

The change in the law and the prince's poor public image (his travel expenses are also being examined and there were rumours that he was shipping his bullet-proof Porsche to Paris) left FUNCINPEC beleaguered. The PM then began sacking its officials – in all more than 300 were axed. The prince also quit as head of the National Assembly, triggering the firing of his 104 advisers. Many of the prince's followers then defected to Hun Sen.

The prince's father, King Norodom Sihanouk, 83, refused to come to the aid of FUNCINPEC, the political party he founded. Instead, while holidaying at his residence in North Korea in April, he became involved in making a 12-minute film with two of his royal offspring. The film poses the question: "Who doesn't have a mistress?" The storyline is simple: extramarital affairs should not be used as a pretext to persecute Cambodia's royalist officials. Unfortunately, it is often the mistresses rather than the officials who are persecuted. Many wives, unhappy their husbands keep sweethearts, instigate acid attacks or order killings of the mistresses.

Few mourn the fall from grace of Prince Ranariddh, who did little to check the abuse of power and corruption by our ever more authoritarian government. But what remains of our opposition, the Sam Rainsy Party? Once so critical of Hun Sen, the SRP began to cosy up with the PM just before FUNCINPEC's demise! Tally-ho!

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "Flag burning does not overly concern me," flagmaker Robin Ashburner told reporters in Swansea, "because it's just an expression of opinion. Flags are emotive, but it's better to take your feelings out on one than indulge in violence. When those cartoons about the Prophet Muhammad appeared in a Danish newspaper, orders for our Danish national red-and-white flag began flooding in. They're still selling well, but our customers should be warned. Modern flags are made largely of polyester, and when they burn, they melt. That means if they are whirled around by a protestor, his or her fellow protestors could be splashed by flying pieces of burning material. If it got into the eye, it could do serious damage, and we are about to issue a warning to this effect on our website."

The owner of the Mr Flag company continued: "A lot of flag burners make their own out of strips of cloth. But there is a trend among shop owners in certain parts of the world to order in large amounts in advance, to sell to protestors. Scandinavian flags are now even more popular with flag burners in Gaza City, Beirut, and Damascus than the Star of David or the Stars and Stripes, which used to be the best sellers over there. Nowadays, we get almost as many orders from Europe as we do from the Middle East, so this is very much a global phenomenon. I even had one call this week from an American guy who was fed up with seeing the American flag being burned on news TV. He wanted me to supply him with the official Hamas colours, so he could be the first American to be shown on CNN burning a Hamas flag. But sadly, I had to turn him down, because Hamas is still a proscribed terrorist organisation in the UK." *(South Wales Evening Post, 15/2/06. Spotter: David Hansel)*

– ● –

● *Dr Malisye & Gogo Wadidi the Chief Herbalist.*

For those that are desperately looking for a doctor to help, we are here for you. Dr Malisye has got the new powerful stuff to solve any problems as follows: ● *Bring back lost lover;* ● *Flutter;* ● *Tokoloshe problem, court cases;* ● *Work problem, boosting business;* ● *Financial problems;* ● *Lotto, Casino, Horses;* ● *Penis enlargement, body sickness AND MANY MORE.*

Dr Malisye & Gogo Wadidi work with all the short boys and therefore challenge problems which other doctors have failed with sickness and bends. All our jobs are 6 hours guaranteed. Pay after job is done, but with deposit.

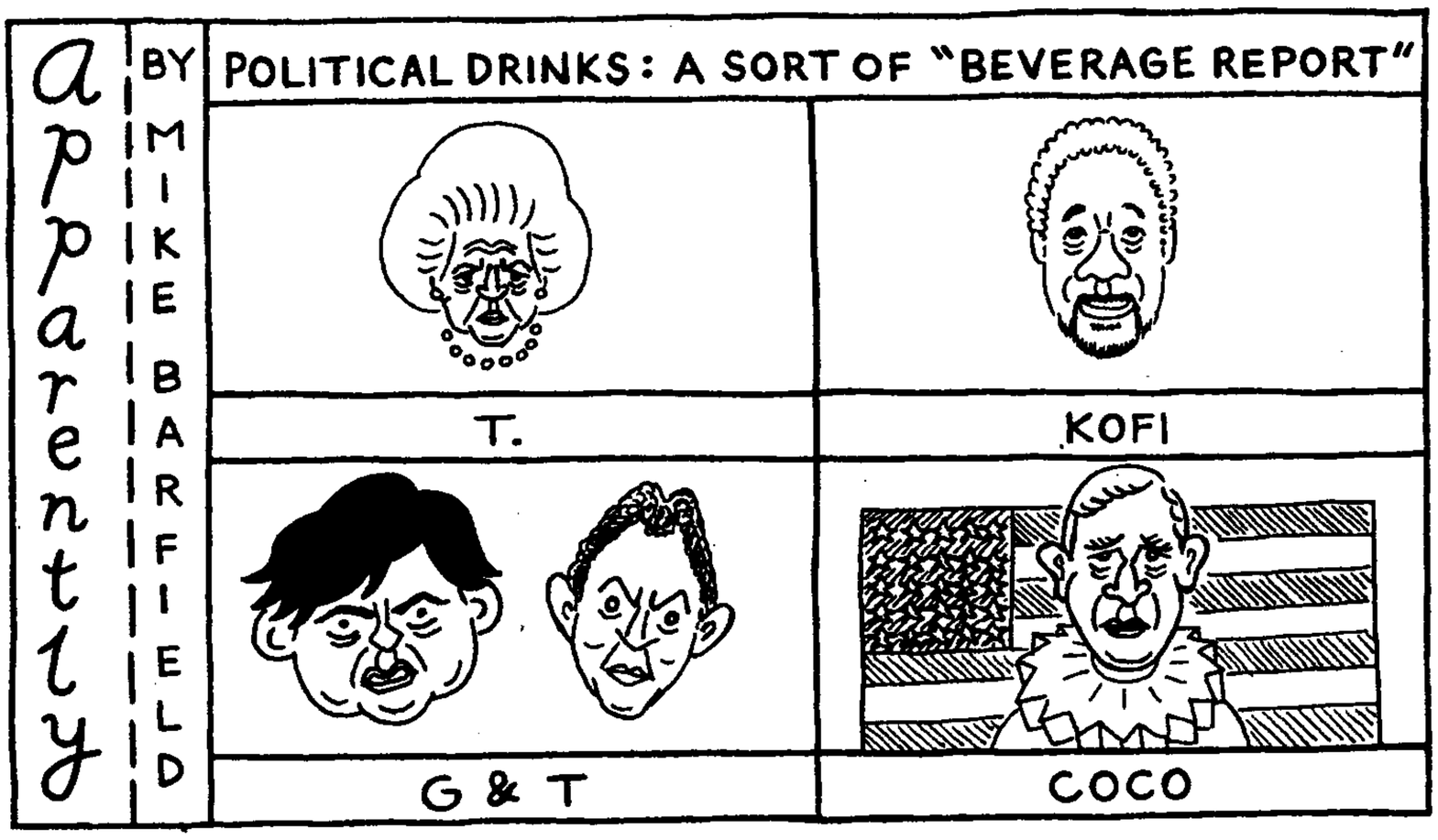
Contact Dr Malisye and approach your life differences. 073 461 1234 or 078 187 823. 219 Bazley Street, Port Shepstone. (Advertisement in South Coast News [South Africa], January 2006)

– ● –

● "John Dunne is guilty of surf rage," magistrates were told in Manley Local Court, New South Wales, "and he has gone way beyond the boundaries of acceptable surfing etiquette. So obsessed was he with keeping all the best waves for himself that he began a campaign of intimidation against other surfers,

smashing their surf boards, hurling abuse, and threatening them with physical violence. His known victims include an Anglican minister, a schoolboy, and a local lifeguard, and we have had complaints from at least seven others. For the sake of the sport, he should be banned from all beaches in New South Wales immediately."

Passing judgement against thirty-four-year-old Dunne, Magistrate Andrew George said "Surf rage is becoming a serious problem, because of the increasing number of surfers on beaches, all searching for quality waves. But the waves exist for everybody, and no one surfer has the right to claim them as his own. We are living in a changing coastal community, where the issue of crowds is going to become ever more important, and it's unacceptable to threaten other surfers. I think that a decision to ban you from going to any of the beaches in the entire state would be a bit beyond the pale, but I am banning you from going within 100 metres of all nine of the Sydney-area beaches, until further notice." *(Surfer magazine, 9/2/06. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

In view of the vicar's absence on one of his many well-deserved holidays, this week's newsletter is written by Mr Prescott (pictured right, by Mr de la Nougerede), who, luckily for us, has enough time on his hands these days to help out with little jobs such as this one. D. Hill, Editor.

BROTHERS!

And that's a word you haven't heard around this parish for rather a considerablised time in my opinion!

And of course when I say "Brothers" I also inclusivise "Sisters" in reference to the female members of the parish, for whom, as is well known, I have a very great respectuality!

And firstly I would like to take this opportunity, with Tony swanning about with his good lady at the Castello Fribi, to clarificate a number of important points with regard to my role in the life of this parish.

Point number one: Contrary to the allegorisations made by a number of disaffectionate individuals, I am still very much the Number Two figure in St Albion's. I am as indispensable as ever, in fact even more so, since it is my job to bang heads together when Gordon and Tony are having one of their poofy tiffs, which you can take it from me is all the bloody time!

If it wasn't for my dipsomatic skills, I can tell you, the whole bloody shooting match would have fallen apart, and we would have become a complete laughing stock!

Point number two: Let me ensure you that I am busier than ever, 23/7, which is why the vicar asked me not to do any of my old jobs any more, so that I could consecrate my energies on the really vital task of knocking balls together on my

croquet lawn *(surely "heads together"? D.H.)*.

Point number four: Just consider my itinerant for last week.

Monday 4.15 Important away-day departmental brainstorming croquet match with key members of the parish team.

Tuesday 11am Chairing judges' meeting of "St Albion's Largest Marrow Competition", preparatory to forthcoming annual Flower Show and Fete.

Wednesday 7.15pm Presiding at ceremonial dinner to launch "Friends of China Society" in our newly-opened Chinese restaurant in the High Street, the Peking Garden, with guest speaker Hang Em Hi from the Chinese Embassy.

Thursday 11am Important interview with new diary secretary. Shortlist drawn up by Mrs Prescott – includes the following names:

Mr Simon Gaytrouser
Mr L.O. Sailor
Mr Mark Oaten.

Friday 9am Final of departmental think-tank croquet tournament for the Dorneywood Trophy, followed by cebrelatory luncheon at which I proposed a toast to absent friends, ie Tony and Cherie, currently sunning themselves with that little Italian crook they met a few years back who likes to ponce about with a hanky on his head, singing love songs to Cherie and giving Tony watches. It's lucky for them that there's no paparizzas from the St Albion's Sunday Mail snooping around behind a hedge with one of those long-lens digitalised cameras, or heaven knows what the parishioners would think if they knew what their vicar gets up to on his free-loading so-called holidays.

As you will see from the above, I have got my hands well and truly tied (and, no, Mr Mandelson , that is not a double nintendo with reference to Miss Tracy Temple, who has been redeployed to other parish duties under Mr Reid, and, no, that is not another of your double ententes, thank you, Mr Mandelson!).

So, let me surramise, for the benefit of all parishioners what is my message to you this week:

1. I am going nowhere.

2. And if the vicar thinks he can sack me, then he should remember that I know where the bodies are buried (and I don't mean in Mrs Harman's new multi-storey churchyard).

3. I think I make myself clear, and you can all booger off if you don't like it!

Yours, still very much on the job,
John Prescott
Horneywood.

P.S. Please note that, as from half an hour ago, all mail items such as letters and cards of sympathy should be forwarded to my old address, c/o the Working Men's Club. I would like to make it clear that my decision to give up my grate-and-flavour residence at Horneywood was entirely my own decision and had nothing to do with the late-night call I received from the vicar, telling me to pack my bags and be out in the morning.

A Grave Issue!!

Mrs Harman writes: **Following our successful sell-off of half the graveyard for much-needed affordable executive homes, we are now rather short of space for members of the dead community. That is why I have come up with an imaginative new "two for the space of one" burial solution, in which you and your loved ones can be interred in a standing-up situation, just like the famous terracotta warriors of ancient China. This will free up even more space in the churchyard for a new grace-and-favour retirement mansion for Mr Prescott of the Working Men's Club, complete with Olympic-size croquet lawn. Of course, this will only be required in the event of Mr Prescott retiring, which, as he makes clear in the above newsletter, will not be for a very long time yet! H.H.**

GRAND SUMMER FUND RAISER!!

Your chance to purchase a copy of Dr Kelly's Death Certificate – personally signed by the vicar's wife and Mr Campbell.

Bearing the inscription "Good Riddance Dr Mitty!" the certificate will be sold by auction to the highest bidder in the vicarage garden at the annual Summer Fete.

Opening bids invited from £2,000!!

Other attractions include:

Guess John Prescott's weight and win a croquet set! T.B.

Parish Postbag

Dear Sir,

I have the greatest respect and admiration for John Prescott, who has loyally served the parish for many years, despite his various disadvantages and personal shortcomings. Knowing John as I do, I feel certain that he will wish to do the decent thing as soon as possible.

I enclose a bottle of whisky and a revolver, as a small token of my heartfelt gratitude for our long association, and I am sure he will know how to put them to an appropriate use (if he doesn't try to shoot the whisky and drink the gun, which I wouldn't put past him!).

P. Mandelson,
former Churchwarden,
Rue des Matelots, Bruxelles.

BLAIR DEFENDS INVASION OF FOREST GATE

by Our Terrorism Staff **W.M. Deedes**

THE PRIME Minister today defended the invasion of a house in Lansdown Road, Forest Gate, insisting that "Weapons of Mass Destruction" would eventually be found there.

The invasion, by 250 crack police marksmen and chemical warfare experts, was based, he said, on "foolproof evidence contained in a dossier compiled by the intelligence services".

"It may take time," he continued, "to find the weapons in the house, but make no mistake they will be found – unless they have been moved out to a neighbouring borough. Anyway, this is a big house, a one-up, one-down, and there is even a garden shed at the back.

"These weapons could be anywhere or nowhere. As I speak, officers are in a wardrobe upstairs with a torch. Sooner or later they are bound to find something, unless they don't."

Chemical Wardrobe

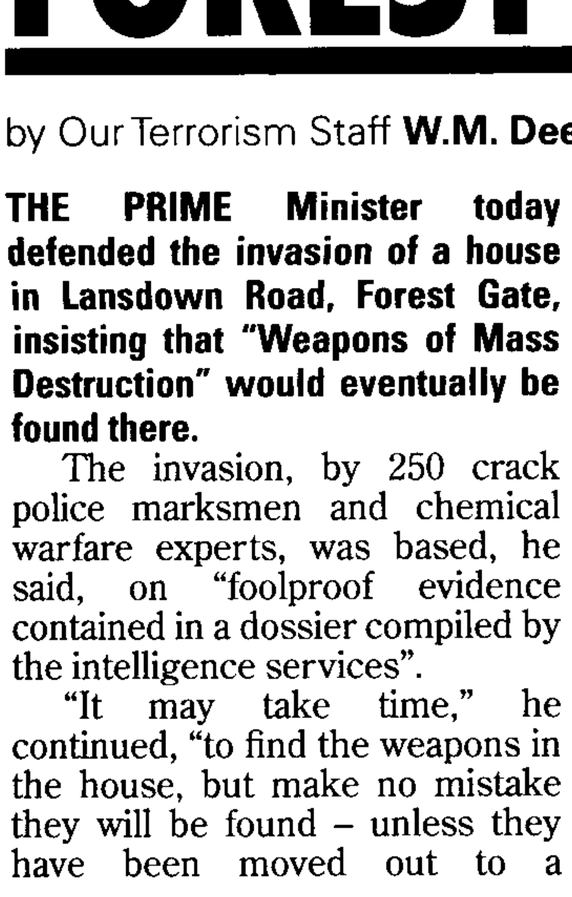
The Prime Minister was then asked about the unfortunate shooting of various members of the household during the invasion, to which he replied, "It is unfortunate that there have been civilian casualties, but in the war on terror there is bound to be collateral damage."

The Prime Minister finally handed out copies of the intelligence dossier which he had printed out from the internet, which made the sensational claim that deadly mothballs the size of a marble were capable of killing millions of people in Britain **WITHIN 45 MINUTES**.

Weapons of Moth Destruction

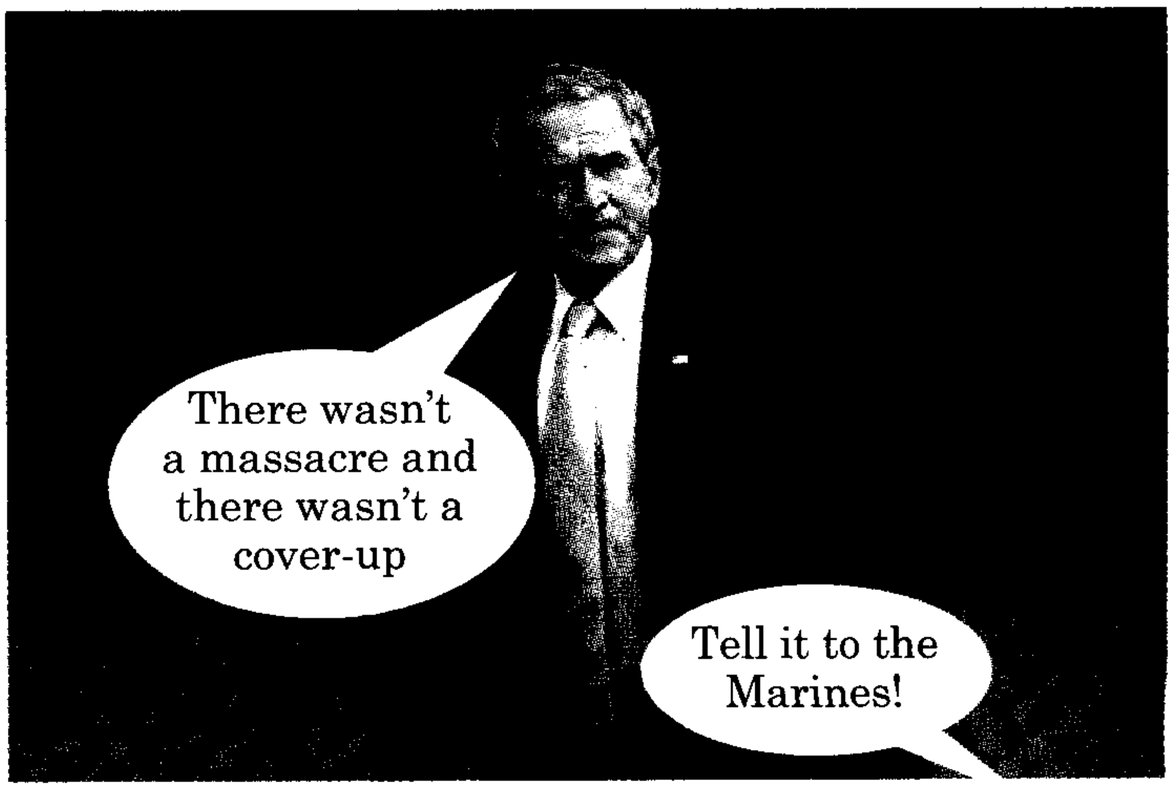
"We had no choice," he insisted. "We had to invade and we will stay in Forest Gate for as long as it takes to restore democracy to this troubled borough of East London."

The Deadly Possible Range Of The Unfound Bomb



On Other Pages "Bring Our Policemen Home," says Max Hastings **94**

HADITHA SHOCK



Nursery Times

GRUNT/PUDDLEDUCK ARE THEY ENGAGED?

by **Beatrix Potty**

A LEADING farmyard gossip writer, Mr Richard Kaystack, last night set tongues wagging in the nation's fashionable hen houses and pigsties when he claimed that Jemima Puddleduck and her beau Hugh Grant were engaged to be married.

Says Kaystack, "Friends of Jemima tell me that Grunt secretly proposed with a diamond and sapphire ring through his nose and promised to give up his pig-about-town ways."

Jemima, daughter of the late man-eating shark, Sir Fishy Jampaste, was said by other friends to be "over the moon, just like the cow."

Said Richard Kaystack, "This will be the biggest wedding since the owl and the pussycat – and you read it here first. Unless it's not true."

Late News

Grunt and Puddleduck – it's all over, Richard Kaystack Exclusive.

Souvenir Facsimile Newspaper of the Greatest Day in British History

OUR YOBS GO IN!

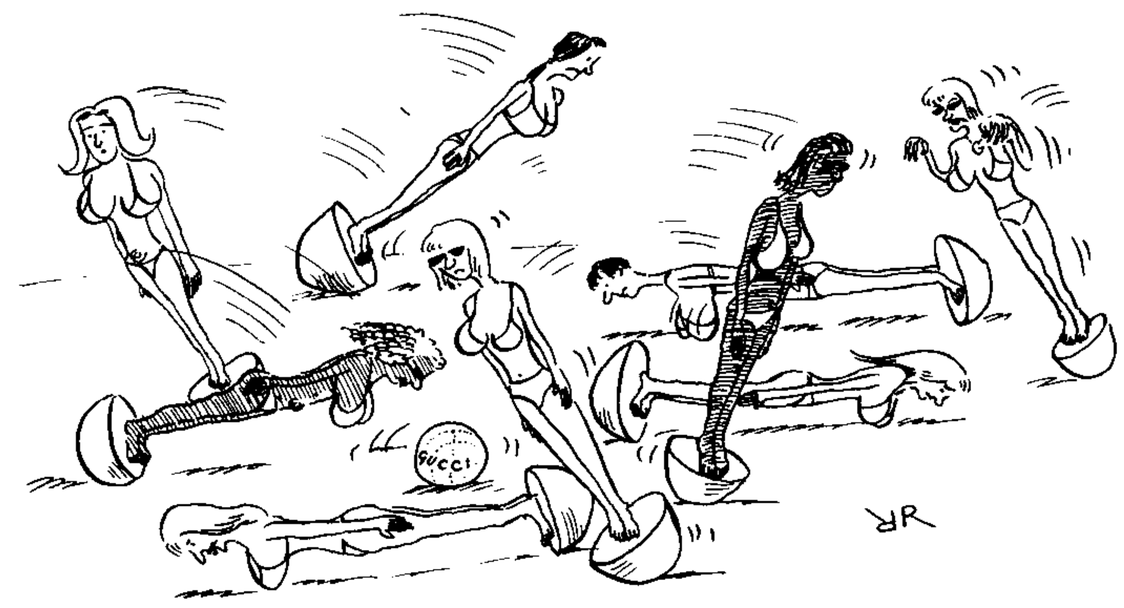
by Our War Correspondent *WWII Deedes*

Germany, Monday Today I saw with my own eyes wave upon wave of British yobs, armed only with cans of lager and flags from Asda, crossing the Rhine and occupying the German heartlands.

In the greatest push of the long-running conflict, British yobs swept across the country, leaving a trail of mayhem and destruction behind them.

Said one German civilian, cowering in his cellar, "For you, Tommy, the beer is overpriced". *(Surely "war over"? Ed.)*

Full story and pictures ***94***



Subbuteo Footballers' Wives

Advertisement

The legendary British spy is back in an explosive new adventure - DR NO SURRENDER (surely some mistake?). The name's McGuinness... Martin McGuinness! Join him as he takes on the paranoid Dr Paisley and his sidekick with the Bowler Hat! (Are you sure this is right? Ed.) Thrill to the man who likes a molotov cocktail, shaken not stirred (that's enough Bond, Ed.).

STABBINGS HORROR – LATEST

by Our Crime Correspondent **Stanley Knife**

SHOPPERS in a crowded London street were shocked today when a teenage man was callously not set upon by a gang of knife-wielding thugs.

"It was just so unexpected," said one shocked eyewitness. "The poor guy was minding his own business, and next minute this gang of idiots armed with six-inch blades cold-bloodedly failed to cut him down. I can't believe this hasn't happened."

"I see he no longer does his own stunts"

GNOMEBY'S

BOND STREET & ABU DHABI

Sale of Highly Important Objets D'Art and Memorabilia, formerly the property of Her Late Royal Highness the Princess Margaret, Countess of Rothman.

Lot 1
Very Significant Porcelain Ashtray, inscribed 'A Souvenir of Mustique', showing hand-painted scene of natives and palm trees, c. 1966. Artist anonymous. On reverse the legend 'Made in China'.
Estimated price £12,500.00.

Lot 2
16cm Cigarette Holder in Ebony-style plastic, ornamented with diamond-style glazing, believed to be a personal gift from the late Peter Sellers.
Estimated price £800,000.00.

Lot 3
Clipper Cigarette Lighter, fashioned in translucent plastic and bearing the inscription 'Put a Tiger in your Tank', believed to be a gift from the Hon. Colin Tennant.
Estimated price £1000.00.

Lot 4
Pair Garden Secateurs, in mint condition. Still in box, with card attached 'Happy Christmas Your Highness, see you Thursday at my place, love Roddy" (the Honourable Roderick Llewellyn, second son of the Lord Llewellyn of Horsebox).
Estimated price £250,000.00.

Lot 5
Set of 3,000 Gin Bottles, empty. A collection dating from various periods, curated by the Earl of Snowdon and others, including the following brands: Gilbey's, Gordon's, Plymouth, Bombay, Hiroshima, Tesco Own Brand.
Estimated price £0.25.

Sale Room

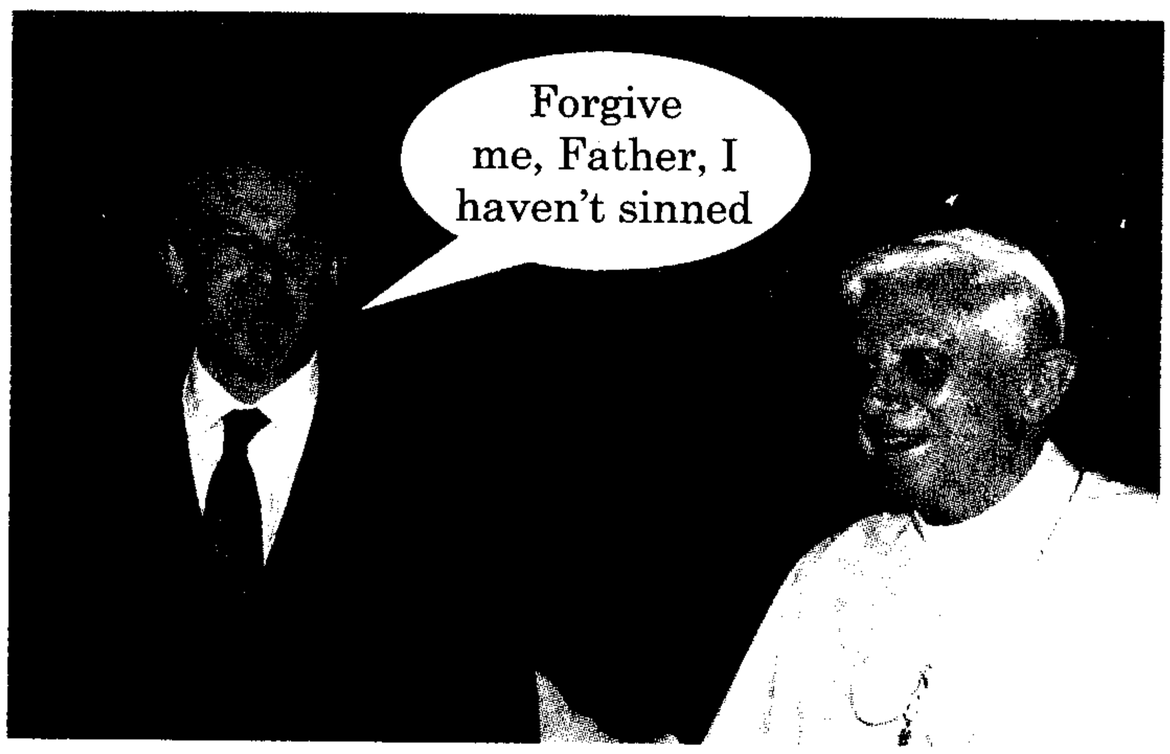
Record Price Given For Ming

by Our Auction Staff

A 3,000-year-old Chinaman, thought to be the only one of his kind still surviving in the world, yesterday fetched a record low price of 1p at Sotheby's.

Described as being in very poor condition and "somewhat cracked", the Ming dates from the late Lib Dem period, and was only recently discovered in the back of a Scottish cupboard, from where it was brought out to be the leader of the party.

THE WORLD'S HOLIEST MAN



AMAZING NEW PICTURE OF PRESCOTT ROCKS GOVERNMENT

by Our Political Staff **Terry Photo-Lenz**

THIS IS the sensational photograph of John Prescott that has sent shock waves around the country.

It clearly shows John Prescott sitting at his desk doing some work. Nowhere in the picture can we see a secretary with her legs around Prescott's neck nor is he hitting any members of the public nor is there any sign of a croquet mallet.

Hard Labour

Said one shocked Labour backbencher, "This is completely unacceptable behaviour. The thought of Prescott actually being in charge of anything will outrage ordinary people throughout the country."

He continued, "Nobody wants to see Prescott actually doing anything important. Why can't he stick to what he's good at, ie being a national laughing stock who makes Blair look almost competent?"

Working Party

However, the Prime Minister immediately defended his deputy, saying, "This is just John being John. What he does in his own office is his own private affair." He concluded, "John Prescott has my complete confidence. Though, to be on the safe side, I have asked him to give up his desk."

CHANNEL FOUR IN TOURETTE'S SHOCK

by Our Media Staff **Phil Space**

A HUGE storm erupted yesterday over the appearance of Channel Four on national television.

"Night after night we are witnessing a continual stream of obscenities, filth and four-letter words from this disturbed young channel," said one shocked mental health expert. "The channel is clearly suffering from an advanced case of Tourette's Syndrome.

Borette's Syndrome

"It clearly cannot help itself. Every programme it shows has to be about violence, pornography or sexual perversions, punctuated by involuntary outbursts of the 'F' word every other minute."

A leading psychiatrist said, "It is sad and demeaning for Channel Four to be put on television, just so that millions of viewers can laugh at its mental deficiencies."

Channel Fourette's

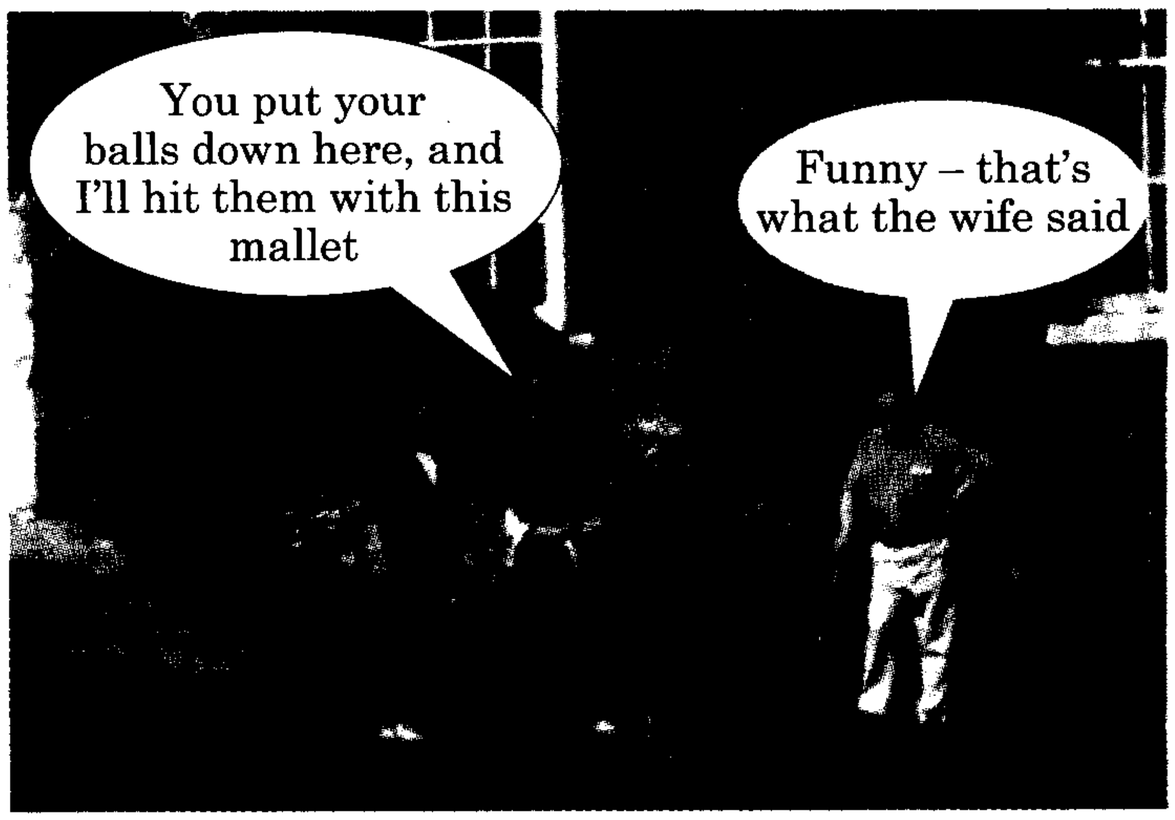
But TV bosses hit back, saying that the decision to put Channel Four on air was "a brave one, as it shows the public just how bad television programmes are".

Who Are They, The Frontrunners In The Race To Be Labour's No. 2?

THESE are the six top hopefuls for the job of playing croquet at Dorneywood and having it off with their secretaries *(surely "Deputy Prime Minister"? Ed.).*

1. **Alan Johnson**, high-flying Minister in the Department of Paperclips. Formerly aide to Geoff Hoon and strongly tipped as the man you haven't heard of. Odds 2/1
2. **John Alanson**, low-flying highflyer from the Ministry of Ministries. Formerly aide to Peter Hoon and known as a pro-Blair Brownite. Odds 7/2
3. **Mrs Harriet Blears**, highflying former Deputy Director for Women's Affairs at the Equality Ministry. Staunch ally of pro-Brown Blairite, Margaret Hoon. Odds 8/1
4. **Mrs Bleary Harriet**, highflying mid-ranking Hoonite and former Assistant Minister for Inter-Departmental Communication under Under-Minister Johnson Alanson. Odds 100/30
5. **Ed Millipede**, highflying, low-crawling garden insect who many tip as a natural successor to the Blearite Harriet Hoonman. Odds 50/1
6. **John Prescott**, croquet-loving, sex fiend whose amorous escapades delighted the public in the long, hot summer of *(That's enough frontrunners. Ed.)*

CROQUET HOW IT WORKS



"Bedlam is not cruel at all, it's an interesting reality-based social experiment"

YOUR CHANCE TO CHOOSE 'GREAT BRITAIN DAY'

Which historical anniversary do you think we should celebrate each year as the date which best defines "Britishness"?

12 November 62 A.D. Coronation of Queen Boadicea at Stonehenge.

6 March 1305 The great Scottish general William Wallace defeats the hated English at the battle of Braveheart.

12 August 1834 The Puddleduck Martyrs, Britain's first trade unionists, executed on the orders of Mrs Margaret Thatcher.

4 June 1967 Release of iconic Beatles album, *Sergeant Pepper's Incredible Exploding Mushroom.*

30 September 1997 The murder of the late Princess Diana by the Duke of Edinburgh and MI5.

3 February 1999 The marriage of Sir David Beckham and the Princess Poshina of Spicewell in Westminster Abbey.

7 October 1986 The appointment of Mr Andreas Whittam-Smith as first editor of *The Independent.*

(That's enough iconic British dates. Ed.)

Alternative History, Dunkirk. May 1940

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

DIANA – STILL DEAD

Knacker's Amazing Claim

by Our Man At The Wye-on-Wye Festival ***Alan Rubbisher***

IN A SHOCK, off-the-cuff disclosure at the prestigious Wye-on-Wye Literary Festival, Britain's No. 1 policeman, Lord Inspector "Knacker of the Yard" Knacker, revealed that he had written a book called *Even Stevens: My Life In Crime.*

The cream of Britain's literary glitterati sat open-mouthed as Lord Knacker let slip that his new book was now on sale at all bookshops (Waterstone's) and that its price would be a very reasonable £24.99 (although a three-for-two discount was currently being offered by Tesco).

After he had spoken for 40 minutes about the availability of his volume, Lord Knacker took questions, the first of which was "Is it not true that your investigation into the death of Princess Diana has been a complete waste of time and money?"

Not Much Cop

"On the contrary," replied Britain's leading detective, "we have unearthed astonishing new evidence which shows conclusively that Princess Diana is dead, and that the Establishment version of events, ie that she was abducted by aliens whilst pregnant by a direct descendant of the Pharaoh King Fayed the Third, can now be discounted."

Lord Knacker's book can be obtained directly from the Eye Bookline at a discounted price of £39.99.

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam
Desmond Dekker,
Popular Singer

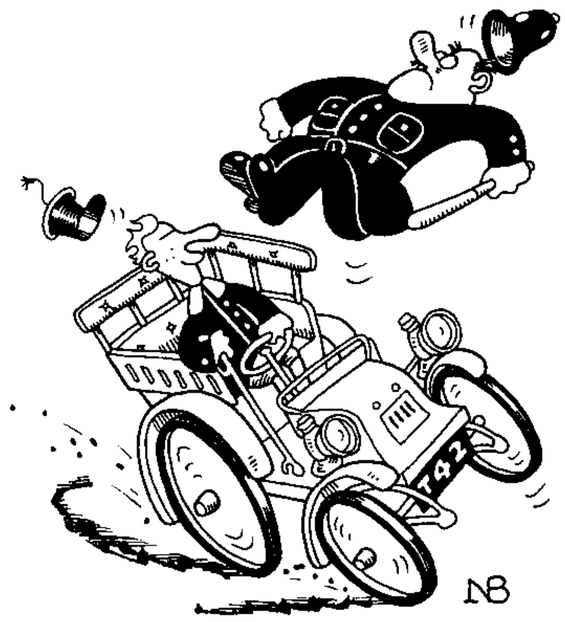
So. Farewell
Then Desmond
Dekker.

You were
Famous for
Your big hit
The Israelites,
Which was used
For a margarine
Advert.

All together now –
"Ooh.... Ooh...
Vitalite!"

E.J. Thribb (77½)

MODERN NURSERY RHYMES



Tom, Tom, the piper's
son.
Stole a car for a bit of
fun.
The car was crashed,
and unabashed,
He went and stole
another one.

Those David Cameron Desert Island Disc Choices In Full

1. *The Times They Are A-Changin'* (from supportin' Labour) **Bob Dylan**

2. *Taking Off My Top Hat* (putting away my white tie, putting on my t-shirt) **Fred Astaire**

3. *Ernie* (the fastest premium bond computer in the West as introduced by a Conservative government) **Benny "Notting" Hill**

4. *Wish You Were Blair* **Green** (formerly "Pink") **Floyd**

5. *Fake Plastic Tories* **Cokehead** (Surely "Radiohead"? Ed.)

6. *Perfect Cycle* **ERM**

7. *This Charming Old Etonian* **The Smythes**

8. *Vote Conservative* Trad. arr. Mandelssohn

Book: An iPod

Luxury: A crate of Scotch, Welsh or Irish whisky.

THAT TORY A-LIST IN FULL

by Our Political Staff **Peter O'Bore**

WHO ARE they, the exciting new A-list celebrities who have become a must-have fashion accessory for every go-ahead local Tory association that wants to lose the next election?

1. **Lulu Lipstick,** 25. High-flying lesbian hedge fund manager of City firm Goldfinger Asset Management. Says Lulu, "My Number One political pin-up is David Blair, or is it Tony Cameron? I'm a bit new to this political game."

2. **Goldman Zac,** 21. High-flying son of the late billionaire Sir Jams Goldfinger. Says Zac, "I'm not interested in politics, but David really passionately believes in saving the planet and that kind of thing, and anyway we were at school together."

3. **Ranjit Dipstick,** 27. High-flying soap star who played the first gay Asian turkey farmer in *Emmerdale.* His passionate embrace with the new gay vet was a landmark moment in British television. Says Ranjit, "This is the Lib Dems I'm joining, isn't it?"

4. **General Wellbeing,** 108. High-flying First World War veteran and a fellow member of White's with David Cameron's great-grandfather. Got on the list entirely by mistake. Says Sir Horace, "Don't quote me, old boy, but this Cameron chap is a bit of a twit, if you ask me." *(That's enough A-list celebs. Ed.)*

Late News

General Wellbeing chosen for first available seat by local Tories **94**

EXCLUSIVE TO THE DAILY MAIL

Non-Story About M&S Which Means We Can Run A Picture Of A Model In Her Bra And Knickers

DAILY MAIL editor Paul Dacre today confirmed that his newspaper would be reprinting an M&S press release so that the paper could accompany it with a picture of a model in her bra and knickers.

On Other Pages

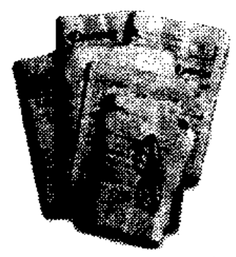
Vitriolic attack on men who view sleazy internet porn accompanied by sleazy photo of a woman in a bra and suspenders **23**

Story of Java earthquake accompanied by photo of tearful survivor in her M&S bra and panties **39**

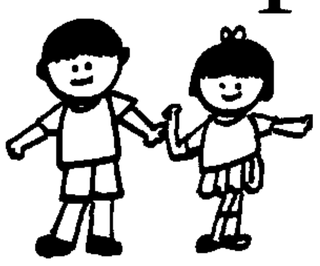
I'VE BEEN FIRED AS A TEA LADY....
IT'S THE END OF AN ERA, VERA.
.. AND REHIRED AS A TEA RELATED ACCIDENT PREVENTION CONSULTANT AT £35,000 A YEAR!

THE INDEPENDENT

NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

This is meant to be a 

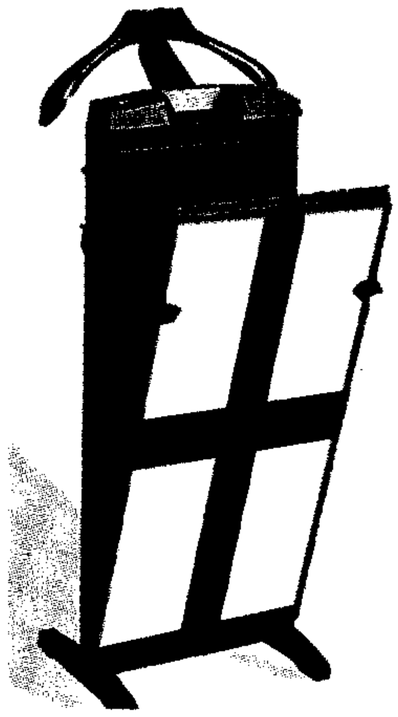
yet the front is full of simplistic

that treats its readers like  . We ask,

is taking the ? Or is the going

down the ?

NEW FROM GNOME



The World Cup TROUSER PRESS

ALL the thrills of the greatest football tournament in the world are yours with the Gnome World Cup Trouser Press!

As the world's finest footballers battle it out on the playing fields of Frankfurt, you can press your trousers in the comfort of your own home!

Approved by UEFA, FIFA and DEFRA, this wonderful themed clothing accessory will, in years to come, become a priceless heirloom for you, your children and your children's trousers.

FLY THE FLAG WHILST PRESSING YOUR TROUSERS AND BELIEVE THE DREAM!

Says famous England Coach, **Sven Goran Eriksson**, "Whenever I meet my lady friends and take off my trousers, I make sure they are in tip top condition when I put them on again."

Send £1966 now to:
Gnome Patriotic Trouser Press Offer,
Unit 5,
Shanghai Trading Estate,

*Flag designed by world-famous flagologist Sir Geraldino Scarfini, FRGS, NBG.

EXCLUSIVE TO ALL NEWSPAPERS EVERY DAY

THAT ALL-PURPOSE WORLD CUP PIECE IN FULL

by Phil Boots

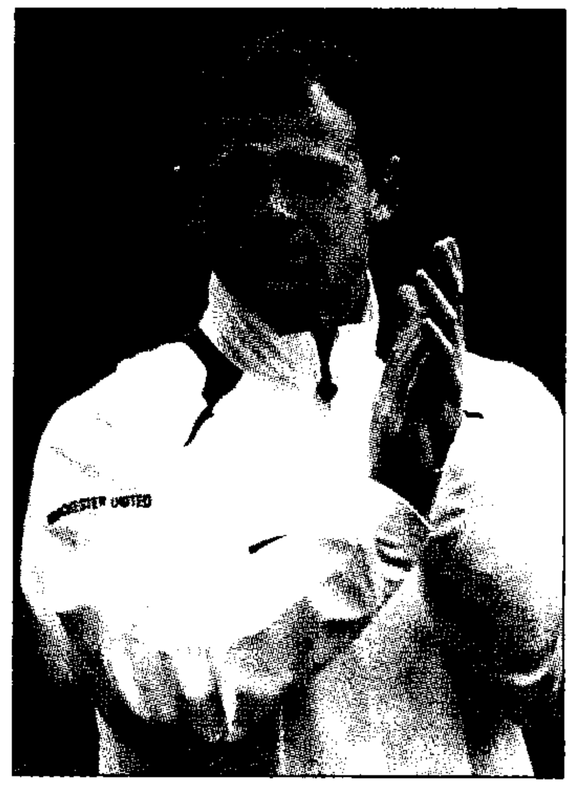
Yes! Wayne Rooney is definitely on the way to Germany / never going to make it.

Doctors were agreed last night that Wayne's foot was healing fast/ worse than ever.

The Rooney metatarsal saga is over at last / set to continue and England can now expect to bring the Cup home / crash out in the early stages.

Make no mistake. This is the best/worst news we've had since I wrote this piece yesterday.

Watch out/don't worry Germany! The World Cup is coming home/we're coming home.



ON OTHER PAGES

Iraq meltdown 92
Afghanistan meltdown 93
Earthquake in Java 94

NEW FILM PROVES THAT ENGLAND DIDN'T WIN

by Our Sporting Staff **John** and **Kevin Keegan**

A NEWLY released high-definition film proves conclusively that England did not win World War Two after all, as has been generally believed for more than 60 years.

Hitherto-undiscovered news-reel footage shows that British troops were actually retreating when they landed in Normandy in 1944 although, on the personal orders of Winston Churchill, the film was shown in reverse, to give British audiences the illusion that the war was being won.

This allowed Churchill at the time to make one of his famous speeches, in which he said, "The troops are running onto the beaches... they think the war's over. It is now".

(Reuters)

the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOODY
PREMIERSHIP DIRECTORS A·G·M·
JUST IMAGINE THAT ENGLAND WIN THE WORLD CUP...
PLAYERS WILL THEN WANT £150,000 A WEEK
WELL IT'S NOT COMING OUT OF MY POCKET!
WE'LL HAVE TO RIP THE FANS OFF EVEN MORE!!

PRESCOTT STORY SOLD

THE *News of the World* today revealed that it has bought the story of John Prescott's croquet mallet for a six-figure sum.

"The mallet will tell all about Prescott," said a hack. "It will reveal how John used it strictly for 'recreation', battered it against balls, then cruelly tossed it aside when their relationship was exposed in the press.

"This is the kiss-and-tell exclusive of the century."

DIARY

SIMON HEFFER

I feel I may be forgiven, not to mention lauded, for adding my voice to the debate and theretofore prevailing upon myself to participate, sine qua non, in the aforementioned great debate as to the destruction of all that we English hold most dear to our hearts along with the civilised values handed down since time immemorial such as roast beef, the Garrick Club, milk stout, barley sugar and corporal punishment, not to mention the sorely-neglected capital punishment which I fear are these days held in disgust and contempt by this so-called government which feels not only contempt but also disgust for those of us who actually work for a living so as to pay their exorbitant wages so that they may swan around in their luxury limousines with their sluggish mistresses by their sides spitting not only contempt but also disgust at all us law-abiding passers-by, and it goes without saying, regardless of what our coloured friends may feel, willy-nilly, or what our learned friends would so charmingly call "the facts", that this scrivener would be the first to admit to a wholesale preference for not being mugged and battered to death outside his own house in full view of his lady wife and two sprogs by one or more of our friends from abroad, bless his unclean and almost certainly unwhite heart, armed with not only a sharp knife but also a machine gun and other such notoriously charming implements – and hear I speak with what my learned friends would call irony – but I feel one may be forgiven for thinking not only once but twice and a hundred times thereafter that moreover there is no sense not only wherever and whatever but also whatsoever in maintaining and upholding a compensation culture in which few things depress one more than the shameless use this so-called government makes, quite regardless of the monstrosities perpetrated by that grotesque pervert and paedophile Gary Glitter, for whom no punishment could be sufficiently severe up to and including the eagerly-awaited return of the hangman's beloved noose of yesteryear, of its power without the faintest semblance of responsibility as personified by Mr Anthony Blair, esquire, who in his nearly ten years dignifying – and I use the term with a hefty dash of irony, a concept lost on the ignoramuses who feed our education system – his office with the sort of repellent disgust not only that but contempt, yes, contempt, for the downtrodden hardworking middle-classes so that back in the real world, that distant, far-off habitation largely unknown to our bully-boy rulers, the full lunacy of a society in which those who abide by the law of the land are treated with not only contempt but disgust by their elected representatives, who spend our hard-earned money handing out literally millions of pounds to the ludicrously tinted and alien bosses of the human rights industry – minorities be damned, they're in the majority now, and so fast-expanding that soon they'll have battered down our back doors and will be awarded licenses to wield their machetes across our hard-earned kitchen stoves thus slicing the heads off our delightful womenfolk while we chaps are out at work earning an honest penny in order to send our assorted sprogs to a school or schools that will not furnish them with a higher education in buggery, muggery, thuggery and all the other assorted uggerys such as socialism – so that we are now left in the execrable situation in which the ghastly nose-in-the-trough spivs, so-called "women" and 57 varieties of the chip-on-the-shoulder brigade who form this so-called government are now in a position to reward one another with the most monstrous baubles for the effective abandonment of all morals and principles in the onward rush for self-gratification, boosted not a little by the Race Relations Industry, not unaware of the fact that, as you will already be aware, for the sake of the mental health of its readers, this column is unashamedly old-fashioned in its heartfelt desire to turn back the clock to those days of yore when the English, being a fairminded and tolerant peoples, did not lack the courage to stand up and be counted in their ceaseless battle against political correctness gone mad, or what our learned friends would no doubt refer to, in what we must, for fear of prosecution by the Thought Police, laughingly call their wisdom, and here I speak from experience, as the preposterous pronouncements of our notoriously charming thugs, villains, "teenagers" and hooligans who lurk on our street-corners ready to pounce on our womenfolk and molest our children before being rewarded by the so-called powers that be with invitations to Cherie Blair's not only sickening but also repellent celebrity love-ins at Number 10 Downing Street, traditional (a word that means virtually nothing these days) home of the British Prime Minister who, for our sins, these past few years just happens to be Mr Anthony Blair of that parish, who has presided over the wholesale destruction of what my learned friends would still no doubt call our civilisation but which from the seat upon which I have placed my hard-earned posterior looks to me rather more like a once-great land now lying drunkenly in the gutter in a pool of its own vomit, at grave risk not only to itself but also to others for whom old-fashioned concepts like decency and loyalty – and by all means call me old-fashioned, I'm not afraid to not only stand up but also to be counted – are increasingly viewed as dirty words, a misapprehension which leads us straight into the Gulag, frogmarched into solitary confinement with the door locked behind us and the key thrown away by our gaolers, of whom Mr "Dave" (!!!!) Cameron, with his oleaginously-spouted tripe of the complete and utter variety is our most over-promoted representative and to whom more in sorrow than in anger I feel I must offer some sage advice, namely that, leaving unhelpful considerations such as foreign criminals drugged up to the nines bringing terror to our village greens aside for one minute, he, by whom I mean "Dave" (!!!!!), should not compound his obvious ignorance of worldly matters with pusillanimous pronouncements concerning his proposed ruin of our decreasingly green and pleasant land, which, from where I am sitting, is singularly unpleasant and not-green-at-all, but instead should take a not only long but also hard look at what my learned friends would rejoice in calling this once-great country of ours and should ask himself why the incompetence of this beleaguered so-called government has resulted in our headlong descent into the gutter, a step whose social unpleasantness should not lightly be overstated and now where was I, where are we, where are they, no question about it we're all down the plughole in our proverbial handcart, forsooth.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER

SEE YOU, DAD. ME AND MUM ARE GOING ON A FREE TIBET RALLY...
OH... SHALL I COME TOO?
FUNNY YOU SHOULD ASK THAT, 'COS IT'S ABOUT TIME YOU SHOWED SOME AWARENESS OF THOSE WHO DON'T HAVE YOUR ADVANTAGES...
PEOPLE WHO'VE BEEN STRUGGLING FOR YEARS FOR THE RIGHT TO HAVE THEIR OWN INDEPENDENT SEPARATE IDENTITY RECOGNISED BY THE WORLD...
WHAT, TIBETANS?
NO, US. WIVES AND CHILDREN OF FAMOUS PEOPLE... WE'RE TRYING TO GET OURSELVES ON THE NEWS...
YOU'D ONLY HOG THE LIMELIGHT, GARY...
OKAY. I'LL STAY AT HOME THEN, SHALL I?

Literary Review

Class bore

Wicked!

Jilly Cooper

(Bantam, £17.99)

"SETTLE down boys and girls," pleaded the teacher. "I want you all to welcome our distinguished visitor, the author of your set book, *Wicked!*"

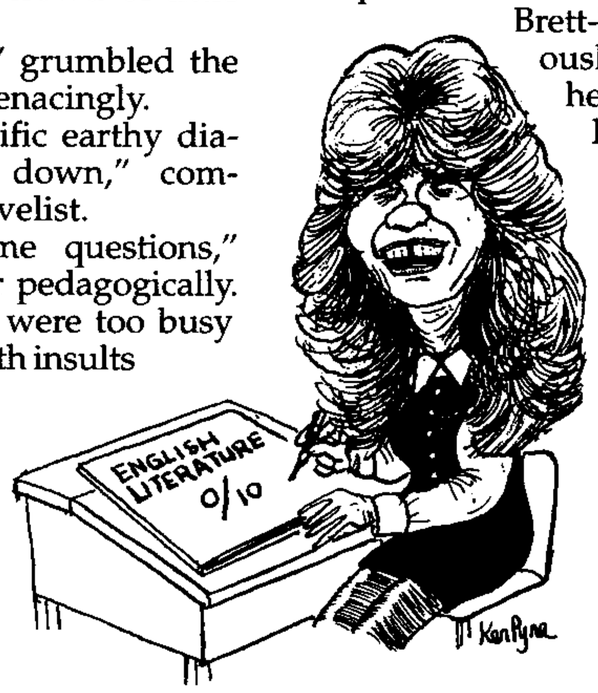
The children collectively groaned. None of them would ever use that ubiquitous expression of youthful approbation again. So uncool! But their beaming guest seemed unaware of their sneers.

"Gosh, hello," she gushed. "What an adorable crowd of little urchins!"

"Fuck off, miss," grumbled the one called Pitbull menacingly.

"I say, what terrific earthy dialogue! Write that down," commanded the lady novelist.

"Let's have some questions," exhorted the teacher pedagogically. Most of the urchins were too busy texting each other with insults and assignations, or rolling spliffs under their broken desks, but one or two put up their hands. "Yes, Scumbag, you first," pointed the teacher.



"Well, Miss," said the one called Scumbag, who looked as if his mother had given birth on a slagheap, or perhaps was one herself, "wossit all abaht, ven?" he queried, in his hilariously accurate working class accent.

"Good question, and a deeply valid contribution," volunteered the teacher redundantly, like much of the dialogue in the novel, "perhaps our guest can tell us what her book is about."

The lady novelist sighed. Of course they hadn't read it, poor dears, they could hardly concentrate long enough to read their own names if they hadn't taken their Ritalin.

"Well," she began, "it's about two schools, rich and poor, and two heads, hunky and feisty, and they get into bed with each other in a sort of public-private partnership. Or perhaps," she guffawed, "in a pubic-privates partnership!" The children were now entirely captivated by her charm, some of the boys had even started playing pocket "snooker" under the desks.

"It's about a failing comprehensive, in a place called Larkminster, which recruits a new headmistress called Janna Curtis, supposedly to revive its fortunes," she explained. "Only what the local council and the educational management company and a local housing developer really want is for the school to fail, so they can close it down and build a gated community of executive homesteads.

"They're the baddies, of course. But what they haven't reckoned on is fiery redheaded Janna's capacity to love her urchin kids to bits, and in a bid to improve their lot she accepts the offer of hunky Hengist Brett-Taylor, the furiously charismatic headmaster of a local public school, Bagley Hall, to share facilities and, it has to be said, the occasional bed. So the rough kids with names like Feral, Graffi and Pearl, and the smooth kids with names like Cosmo, Xavier and Dora, get to meet each other. And they do a joint school play, in which the boy from the care home who was gang-raped at the age of 11 plays Romeo and one of the posh totties from the toffs' academy plays Juliet, and everyone thinks it's brilliant, except the baddies of course, who just sneer and sneer like a lot of sour-faced book reviewers."

She barely paused for breath before frothing on about how the two schools then go off on a joint geography field trip, though they mostly practise their chemistry and biology (in the form of drugs and sex). "And that's when Hengist and Janna go head to head, as it were," she chortled.

"And then," she further recounted, "they have an Ofsted report done and Hengist attends the headmaster's conference and Janna wins the national teaching awards, but it all goes pear-shaped because Hengist cheats his exam results and loses his school, and his daughter turns out to be a lesbian and her rugger-bugger boyfriend falls for Janna, who's also lost her school, and the baddies all turn out to be involved in a paedophile ring but some of the kids (along with their Labrador dog) manage to round them up and hand them over to the police, just like the Famous Five in an Enid Blyton novel, though perhaps they should be called the Infamous Five, because they come from a sink estate, don't you know, and after 840 pages of this guff I run out of ideas and the printers run out of paper so that's it."

Books & Bookmen

■SO HMV has finally succeeded in its bid to add Ottakar's to its Waterstone's operation.

At 285p per share or £62.8m for the company, the offer was slightly better than the opening bid (see last *Eye*), but a way short of the 440p offered last year. Even combined and with the closures and redundancies hinted at by Alan "Weasel" Giles, the outlook is none too encouraging, and presumably the Ottakar's directors and shareholders wanted to cash in before the share price got any lower.

Meanwhile, some were hoping for a last-minute offer from WH Smith, but it had become increasingly clear that most towns with an Ottakar's already had a WH Smug branch, and that duplication was unlikely to be good for either company.

Maybe HMV should thank those who got the bid referred to the Competition Commission for saving it £34m!

■WHEN Andrew Roberts lauded Niall Ferguson's *War of the World* in the *FT* at the end of last month, the puff ("well researched, highly readable, high quality TV series is accompanying an even higher quality book") extended one of book reviewing's most enduring romances.

"Alpha double plus!" Ferguson ejaculated over Roberts' *Eminent Churchillians* back in 1994. He later chose his chum's *Salisbury* as a Book of the Year ("as delightful to read as it is informative"), and the canoodling between the two *Sunday Telegraph* contributors continued when he reviewed *Hitler and Churchill* ("as fine a first-class essay as you could ever hope to read"). No doubt there was much back-slapping after the *FT* review at the Beefsteak Club, where the two right-wing historians are both members.

■SEEKING to further expand coverage of the Hay Festival in the *Guardian* (a mass already visible from space), the paper decided to have various children's authors interviewed by "the kids who read them" – namely Maya and Alix Hattenstone, two "book-loving ace reporters" who by an astonishing coincidence, happen to be the 12- and 14-year-old daughters of *Guardian* feature writer Simon Hattenstone.

Their success will have delighted their mother, freelance hack Diane Taylor, who uncharacteristically hasn't had a byline in the *Guardian* for nearly a month.

■THE July *Tatler* has opened the season of summer reading recommendations and as usual Geordie Grieg's glossy has set a standard of shameless log-rolling that other organs will find it hard to match.

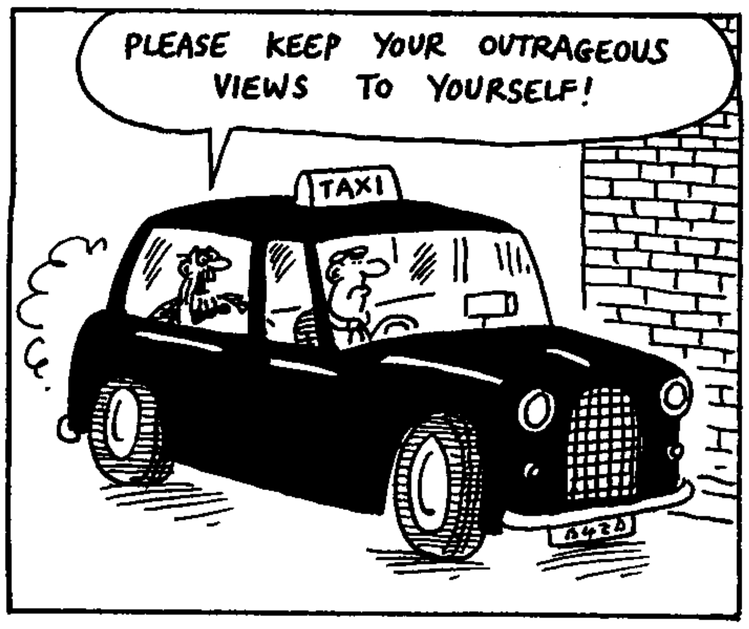
A.A. Gill plugs a novel by Bella Pollen, who figures in his restaurant columns as an irresistibly sexy lunch guest. Zafar Rushdie, with a distinct hint of weary dutifulness, reveals that: "I suppose I'll be reading my father's most recent novel, *Shalimar the Clown*." Rachel Johnson raves about not one but two bonkbusters by Jilly Cooper, "the most life-enhancing woman of modern times" (point to note: Cooper babbled that Johnson's Poly Filler-esque *The Mummy Diaries* was "Wonderful! Such joy, such giggles – Rachel Johnson writes wonderfully").

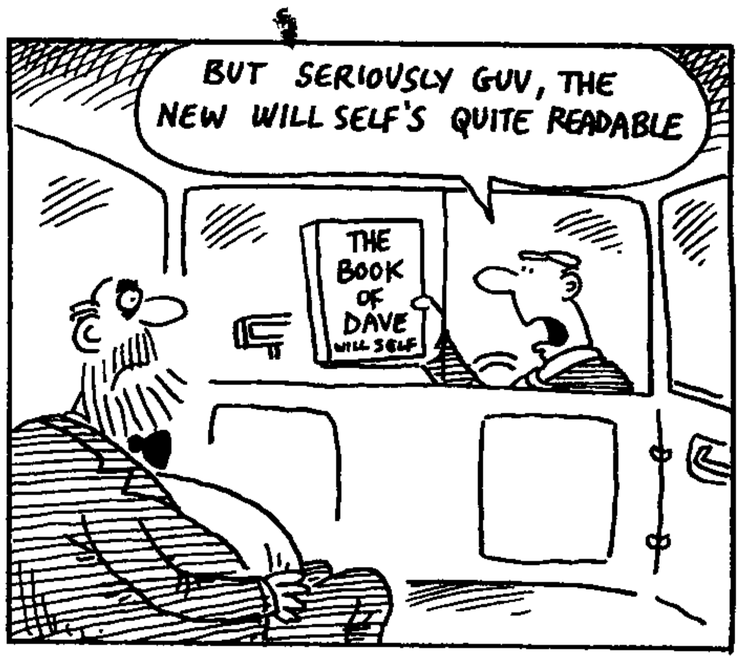
And zillionaire heiress Sigrid Rausing says she "loved" Simon Gray's *The Jouncer*, published by Granta – not a huge surprise, as Granta is now owned by... Sigrid Rausing.

■REMEMBER the error strewn textbook *Sociology and Scotland*, which students were warned against relying on (*Eye* 1145)?

Now the £18.95 tome from Unity Publications has a six-point errata sheet ensuring that students will not be fooled into thinking that the First World War really did take place from 1814 to 1818 or that Donald Dewar was first minister until 2001, as previously pointed out. But one *Eye* reader (with possibly too much time on his hands) has compiled more exhaustive errata covering hundreds of other mistakes including giving the wrong date for John Stuart Mill proposing to give the vote to women and the mis-spelling of Friedrich Engels three different ways (including Engel's).

'Bookworm'





Creative Writting Workshops
23rd & 30th March
Between 2-4pm
at The Chantry, Thornbury.
Gloucestershire Gazette

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

The Year of Henry James: The Story of a Neurosis

David Lodge

(Secker & Warburg, £18.99)

...That afternoon my wife Mary and I drove to Stratford-on-Avon, a town in Warwickshire well known for its Shakespearian associations, where I had agreed to give a talk. In our publicity-conscious age writers often find themselves urged by publishers – who are, understandably, anxious to maximise their returns on the books they produce – to appear at such events: personally I find these gatherings an excellent way of receiving "feedback" from my readers. The evening went well, and yet it contained one ominous moment. I was enjoying a pleasant conversation with a Mrs Enid Grimshaw, who, I was pleased to see, had purchased two copies of my last novel at full price, when I overheard my wife at the bar asking in her usual forceful manner "Is there a glass of wine for David Lodge?"

As it happened, the wine had run out. Instantly I was reminded of the fateful afternoon in which Henry James, the subject of my new novel *Awful! Awful!*, taking tea with his friend Hugh de Selincourt Heigh, and asked by his host if he would like a rock cake, looked up to find the plate empty. Was this a dreadful harbinger of the fate that awaited me? I could not be sure. However, worse was to come. Next morning, switching on my computer, an electronic communications device which many writers find exceedingly useful, I discovered an email from my agent, Tarquin Crawler. Happily Tarquin had read and enjoyed my new book. *"Dear Professor Lodge"* he wrote, *"I just loved"* – there followed a note to his secretary asking her to fill in the novel's title – *"and am pretty sure we can flog it to Secker for fat wads of cash."* Gratified by these words of approbation, I assured myself that I could not doubt Tarquin's sincerity, and yet a tiny bell of warning clanged in my ear. Could he not have said "adored" rather than "loved"? And what did "fat wads of cash" mean? Plump? Gargantuan? I spent a troubled night.

On the following day I attended a party at The Ivy, a well-known restaurant in London's West End frequented by persons distinguished in the media, given for the novelist and son of Kingsley Amis, Martin Amis. Here I was handed a cutting from the *Guardian* newspaper conveying the disquieting news that the Irish writer Dermot O'Hermit was also poised to publish a novel about James's last year. What was I to do? Friends counselled caution. Ian McEwan, over the course of an agreeable sandwich luncheon – he had pastrami, I a bacon, lettuce and tomato – helpfully reassured me that "No one's interested in Henry James anyway, David." These stout words convinced me. I would weather the storm, I decided... [*continues paranoically for hundreds of pages*]

LIBRARY NEWS

■ TWO years late – and at twice the original price – Newcastle City Council has announced the preferred bidder' on its new PFI-funded central library. Japanese contractor Kajima is to take on the £40.2m scheme to demolish the main library and one branch library.

Newcastle started the library procurement process more than two years ago after it won £21m in PFI credits for the project. But all three bidders came in way above budget, forcing them to go back to government, cap in hand.

Meanwhile Kajima hasn't been having the happiest time on other PFI projects, announcing last year that it has lost £80m on its schools contracts, including one in Camden (*Eyes passim*). At Sheffield Northern General Hospital its building works on a £30m, 168-bed unit have been hit by problems and delays.

Anyway, Kajima's grand plans for the Newcastle library include a large atrium and "a main staircase that will lead visitors on a journey to the top of the building". Marvellous.

HIGH PRINCIPALS

INDUSTRIAL action and marking strikes in Britain's universities are causing headaches for many vice-chancellors – not least Leeds Metropolitan chief Simon Lee, who sent a three-page, close-typed, typo-strewn rant to his entire teaching staff complaining about their shoddy behaviour.

Having berated lecturers about the strike, he moved on to rage about their "non-performance unrelated to industrial action... Many colleagues resent having to account for such matters as their time, their use of university funds, their international travel, their performance, their obligation to develop professionally, any days they might have spent away from work or for any other matter," he grumbled.

He then moved on to complain about use of the email system "to denigrate the institution, to be malicious or otherwise to behave badly" and claimed there was a "common tactic" of making the "mischevious [sic] allegation that funds are wasted on investing in improving the estate or in marketing or in new senior appointments". Oh dear, did the nasty lecturers say mean things about you?

Prof Lee has already threatened to sack staff who fail to attend this year's "staff development festival" (last year's event featured singing workshops, bike rides and talks on "wellbeing at work" – *Eye* 1147).

One sign that this management style is not winning him any hearts... the number of staff who forwarded his rant to *Private Eye*.

Invisible Centers: Boris Johnson, authenticity, cultural citizenship and a centrifugal model of media power

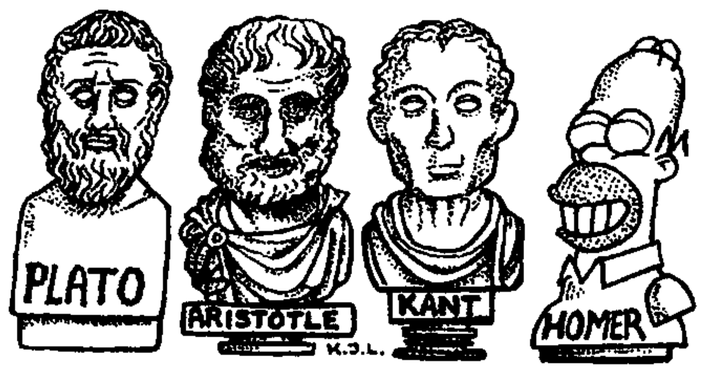
ANDY RUDDOCK,
abstract of article published in *Social Semiotics*

Coinciding with the launch of the exhibition 'New Figurative Realism' at Clapham Art Gallery, controversial artist Mark McGowan is to proposition members of the public to fight boxing matches in the street. Clad in boxing attire, boots, shorts and gloves, McGowan will also be wearing a box on his head with a picture of the Mayor of London Ken Livingstone attached to it. McGowan says: '...Ken is not only the Mayor of London but a true fighter in every sense of the word, so if there are any black cab drivers, congestion charge critics or anybody else that fancy [sic] their chances, I am Ken and I am ready.'

Press release

My whole life had been spent waiting for an epiphany, a manifestation of God's presence, the kind of transcendent, magical experience that lets you see your place in the big picture. And that is what I had with my first [compost] heap.

BETTE MIDLER,
quoted in the *Guardian*



The Simpsons, like Monty Python, is an Anglo-Saxon comedic take on the existentialism which in France takes on a more tragic hue. Albert Camus's absurd is defied not by will, but mocking laughter... The satirical cartoon world is essentially a philosophical one because to work, it needs to reflect reality accurately by abstracting it, distilling it and then presenting it back to us, illuminating it more brightly than realist fiction can. That's why it's no coincidence that the most insightful and philosophical cultural product of our time is a comic cartoon, and why its creator, Matt Groening, is the true heir of Plato, Aristotle and Kant.

Philosopher JULIAN BAGGINI talking at the Bristol Festival of Ideas, reported on the BBC website.

Pseuds Corporate

Introducing ...Wii
As in "we"
While the code-name "Revolution" expressed our direction, Wii represents the answer.
Wii will break down that wall that separates video game players from everybody else.
Wii will put people more in touch with their games...and each other. But you're probably asking: What does the name mean?
Wii sounds like "we", which emphasises this console is for everyone.
Wii can easily be remembered by people around the world, no matter what language they speak. No confusion. No need to abbreviate. Just Wii.
Wii has a distinctive "ii" spelling that symbolizes both the unique controllers and the image of people gathering to play.
And Wii, as a name and a console, brings something revolutionary to the world of video games that sets it apart from the crowd.
So that's Wii. But now Nintendo needs you.
Because, it's really not about you or me.
It's about Wii.
And together, Wii will change everything.

Nintendo press release

CONTRIBUTORS: John MacInnes, Hugh Costello, Andy Greenall, Everybody, Jonathan Riches.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

HOW NHS PRIVATISATION WORKS

Double whammy

QUESTION: Why can't the Alexandra Hospital in Redditch do anything to prevent the threatened closure of its maternity, paediatric and gynaecology units?

Answer: Because it is caught between a rock and a hard place in New Labour's privatisation of the NHS and is powerless to act.

One of eight hospitals in the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Trust, the Alex receives payments from its local Primary Care Trust (PCT) for treating the patients the PCT refers to it. However, the two trusts on which the Alex depends are both having to pay such a high price for privatisation initiatives elsewhere that, through no fault of its own, deep cuts are now threatened at the NHS hospital.

The first problem for the Alex is that the Worcestershire Acute Hospital Trust is saddled with a £30m deficit which, campaigners claim, is largely due to the crazy sums it has had to pay for a PFI hospital in Worcester (see *Eyes passim*). Given the £30m black hole, and the fact that hospital managers cannot cut their payments to their PFI contractors in Worcester (Catalyst Healthcare: a consortium of Bovis, Sodexho and Bank of Scotland), they are looking for savings elsewhere in the NHS and considering a plan to cut 720 jobs, which includes closing maternity and related services at the Alex.

Ironically, these NHS cuts at the Alex in Redditch might actually mean *more* money being paid to the PFI contractors in Worcester. For under the PFI deal, if more than 90 percent of the beds at the Worcester hospital are occupied at any one time, the hospital trust must make extra payments to the consortium. So, if Redditch women continue to have babies after their local maternity unit is closed, and if they then travel to Worcester to give birth, they will fill beds at the PFI hospital and trigger extra payments to the private sector. Brilliant!

Meanwhile the *Eye* has seen documents suggesting that managers at the Alex believe their local Primary Care Trust is diverting orthopaedic patients away from the Alex to a private unit in Kidderminster. The PCT, it turns out, has a block contract with a private Independent Sector Treatment Centre (ISTC) run by Canadian firm Inter Health; and it has to pay for a certain number of operations at the ISTC each year whether the private firm carries out the work or not.

Last year the PCT tried to negotiate away a £193,000 overspend with Inter Health because of "under utilisation"; and the trust's latest Financial Risk Plan warns that up to £1m could be lost this year unless it restricts NHS activity while "maximising use of ISTC capacity". So yet more money will be diverted away from hospitals like the Alex.

The internal document from senior staff at the Alex claims: "The local PCT are advising a lot of patients that the waiting time is longer than it actually is at the Alex and therefore would they like to travel to the Independent Treatment Centre at Kidderminster."

The PCT denied to the *Eye* that it was trying to force patients to go private in Kidderminster, claiming that patients and doctors made their own decisions based on "informed choice". Yeah, right.

A local campaign to "Save the Alex" has been launched, but New Labour ministers remain committed to both the PFI and ISTC schemes. Rather than provoke cuts, Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt claimed they would "build capacity" in the NHS. Some mistake, surely?

HOME OFFICE SPECIAL

The truth Dawns

AFTER the Home Office cock-ups the government might have been expected to address its role in a major criminal scandal more honestly. But when it comes to the theft of tens of thousands of people's identities in order to defraud the leaky tax credits system, Paymaster-General "Red" Dawn Primarolo refuses to lift her head from the sand.

Last November 6,800 fraudulent tax credit claims were made using identities stolen from Department of Work and Pensions staff, swiftly followed by the theft of the identities of 16,000 Network Rail staff. Millions of pounds were lost and thousands of individuals' tax affairs were thrown into confusion – not to mention the anxiety caused to victims who don't know what future consequences there might be.

So why was the tax credit system so vulnerable? Largely because claims could be made over the internet with the minimum of information and verification. Many suspect that the serious risks that materialised last year should have been understood and acted on well before concerted attacks in November forced the closure of the e-portal internet access – a point that a committee of MPs tried to address in February.

Asked when she first knew about ID fraud in the tax credit system, Primarolo said it was in November, just before the e-portal was closed. Though she later claimed she was referring to a couple of specific attacks, the answer ensured that she wasn't asked the obvious question: why didn't you tighten the system earlier? Evidence given to the same committee by the union representing staff who administer tax credits showed that they had presented evidence of ID fraud to senior management *seven months earlier* in April.

In the four months since that committee hearing the *Eye* has been trying to establish exactly when ministers and officials knew about the vulnerability of the tax credits e-portal for identity theft frauds and what assessments were made of the risks. But answers have been repeatedly refused. Requests under the Freedom of Information Act (which the government insists is ushering in a new era of openness in Whitehall) remain unanswered well past the statutory deadline for replying. And parliamentary questions from Lib Dem Shadow Pensions Secretary David Laws have been similarly rebuffed.

This contempt for scrutiny fuels suspicion that the government knew about the threat posed by ID fraudsters months or even years before the big attacks and only shut the stable door once the horse had scarpered (taking millions of pounds with it). Some speculate that, in the face of intense criticism of tax credits, the pressure was on to maintain electronic take-up figures that could be touted in response to unrelenting criticism about overpayments and maladministration. That could only be done by turning a blind eye to the dangers of an insecure system. Tens of thousands of ID theft victims may be paying the price for years to come.

Joined-up Government

FURTHER proof emerges that no one at the Home Office has any idea what anyone else there is up to.

The department's ministers have been lavishing praise on the Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector (Arvac), a research charity which does exactly what it says on the tin, funded by the Home Office's own Active Communities project.

Minister Paul Goggins, whose weighty title is "Parliamentary Under Secretary of State with responsibility for the voluntary and community sector, community cohesion, faith and race equality", sent his congratulations to Arvac on its 100th quarterly bulletin last month, saying the charity "is thoroughly deserving of the high regard in which it is held by the sector, a feeling that is shared in the Home Office."

Whoops! With the minister's praise still ringing in its ears, Arvac was then shocked to learn that the Home Office wouldn't be giving it any more funding this year.

Insult to injury

AT LEAST the Home Office is keeping its promises in one area: further penalising those wrongly jailed by reducing their compensation, no matter how grave the injustice they have endured.

Just over a year ago the court of appeal freed Paul Blackburn (pictured right). He had been locked up when he was 15 and spent 25 years in prison for the attempted murder and attempted sexual assault of a child. He was jailed on the basis of a confession which the appeal judges ruled had been forced out of him. The judges also concluded that police had lied about the "confession" and made parts of it up.

On his arrest, Mr Blackburn, an unruly 14 year old from a chaotic background and an approved school, was interviewed without a solicitor or parent present and was incapable of using the language recorded in his so-called confession. Detained as a juvenile, he should have served no more than his ten-year tariff; but because he protested his innocence and refused to admit to a crime, he was penalised by the parole system and served a further 15 years before his conviction was overturned.

Wrongly branded a child molester, seen as the lowest of the low in the prison pecking order, Mr Blackburn suffered regular beatings and attacks from inmates and, he says, prison officers as he was shipped around no fewer than 18 of the country's toughest jails.

Despite his 25 years of wrongful imprisonment, so far Mr Blackburn has received an interim compensation payment of just £10,000 with which he is supposed to start a new life. Even with incapacity benefit, he still can't afford a settled roof over his head and relies on friends to put him up.

"It is absolutely disgraceful," says his solicitor Glyn Maddocks. "The Home Office insist that there will be no more money until his entire claim has been finalised. But that could take years."

Until the recent Home Office clampdown, he had been expecting further interim payments. But not any more. Mr Blackburn, who is highly intelligent though badly damaged by his experiences, told the *Eye* it was hard enough to adapt to life outside prison. "Often, I just wander the streets at night and talk to drug addicts, prostitutes and homeless alcoholics." Penny-pinching Home Office ministers seem to hope that this man, whose life was taken away when he was a child, stays on the streets with them.

MMR

Leak stew

THE MMR controversy has been rekindled by last week's announcement in Canada that vaccine-strain measles virus has been found in the guts of a large group of children in New York suffering from regressive autism and bowel disease.

This discovery in an entirely separate group of children across the Atlantic is significant in that it replicates the research findings of Professor John O'Leary in Dublin and Dr Andrew Wakefield in London.

Before legal aid was suddenly withdrawn from families of autistic children mounting a group legal action against the drug companies, the judge in the case, Mr Justice Keith, said that Prof O'Leary's discovery of measles virus lodged in the guts and spinal fluid of some autistic children was "pivotal to the claimants' case".

As *Eye* readers will be well aware, health chiefs and the drug company defendants always responded to these findings by saying that the work could not or had not been replicated. Well now it has been by an American team of researchers, led by Dr Steve Walker of Wake Forest University School of Medicine in North Carolina.

The US team is examining 275 autistic and bowel-diseased children. Of the 82 tested so far, 70 (or 85 percent) show evidence of vaccine-strain measles virus lodged in the inflamed tissue of their guts.

Last week, when Dr Walker presented his interim findings to the International Meeting for Autism Research in Montreal, he made it quite clear that this does not in any way suggest that MMR causes autism. What it does show, however, is that a virus that one would expect to be ordinarily cleared by the body is persisting in the inflamed tissues of children with regressive autism and gut disease – and that that virus was introduced via vaccination. There is therefore an association between the measles vaccine and the combined diagnosis of gut disease and autism that demands further investigation. No one knows what it is doing there.

The Walker study has already been attacked by critics because – at the moment – it lacks a "control" group of normally developed children and because it is not yet complete and properly published. But the Dublin researchers led by Prof O'Leary did have control subjects, the majority of whom did not appear to harbour the measles virus.

The same Montreal conference heard details of a study looking at the blood of autistic children, which was published last month in the *Journal of Medical Virology*, which did not find any measles traces. However, two more gut replication studies are due to be published soon, including that by Ian Lipkin, professor of neurology at Columbia University and a world authority on the role of genetic, immune and infection factors in brain disease. He told the Eye that replication work should have been done the moment the alarm bells were rung by Dr Wakefield.

But of course that is the real scandal in the MMR saga. Instead of investigating what was happening with this sub-group of around 3,000 autistic children when the issue was first quietly raised with them back in 1996, health chiefs responded by rubbishing Dr Wakefield and his work. Subsequently they also stopped giving parents the "choice" of single vaccines even though when MMR was first introduced, the department explicitly said that single measles vaccine would continue to be available.

Two and half years ago, Dr Elizabeth Miller, head of the immunisation division of the Health Protection Agency, was shown in the docu-drama *Hear the Silence* saying: "There have been no studies which have shown evidence that the virus is present in these children. So really, there is no basis for now supporting a hypothesis that there is any link between MMR vaccine and autism."

Now there is evidence from two separate cohorts of children, and two separate teams of researchers, that the virus is present in these children; but health chiefs have no plans for a clinical study or to reintroduce single jabs.

The *Eye* asked the department to respond to the Walker study. It said MMR remains the safest way to protect children.

FINANCIAL REGULATION

Loopy loophole?

A YEAR ago the then Pensions Secretary Alan Johnson declared the new pensions regulator open for business: "For over 10 million people in occupational pensions in Britain the new pension protection fund and regulator will provide a new level of security for pensions."

The days of wealthy companies neglecting and even deserting their employees' retirement funds with impunity would be over. But already this promise is threatened by just such a ruse – and the scam has been waved through by the pensions regulator.

Norwegian engineering giant Kvaerner bought British company Trafalgar House ten years ago, taking on thousands of employees and a large pension scheme. Last year, keen to lose the underperforming British operation, it off-loaded the company through a management buy-out (for the princely sum of £1) under which the UK company was renamed TH plc. That just left the pension scheme and its 31,000 members to look after. Or not, as it has turned out.

In April TH announced that it had reached a "final settlement" with the pension fund under which the two would sever all relations. In return the company would pay in £101m by 2012. But the last known deficit for the fund was £245m, while the shortfall on a stricter "buy-out" basis could be as much as £600m.

Experts are perplexed as to why the pensions regulator would accept such a paltry settlement, especially as the last accounts for TH suggest that it could have afforded to fill the pension hole – in which case the tough new pension rules should have enabled the regulator to force the firm to cough up.

One explanation might be that the regulator swallowed the company's claim that the trustees could generate much higher returns than are standard in the industry. Given the backgrounds of the stock market enthusiasts running the regulator, that can't be ruled out.

Chairman David Norgrove ran the Marks & Spencer pension fund as it put most of its money into shares, took pensions holidays in the 1990s and ended up with a thumping deficit. Chief executive Tony Hobman used to run Proshare, promoting the virtues of playing the market (even for schoolchildren), and was at the helm of the late Adam Faith's ill-fated Money Channel.

Another possibility is that Kvaerner/TH found a loophole in the rules which meant they could walk away without paying their debt to current and future pensioners. Neither explanation – a protection regime full of loopholes or a push-over for a regulator – is at all reassuring to the millions of members of schemes with deficits, as unscrupulous employers can now eye up similar tricks.

The trustees who are supposed to look after the members – chaired by a director of Kvaerner, the very company that has washed its hands of them – would only say they intend to pay all pensions by adopting a "pro-active investment strategy", ie betting their way out of trouble. The pensions regulator insists the details must remain confidential, although Norgrove claims they represent "the best deal available".

In parliament Pensions Minister James Purnell has brushed aside a series of questions from Frank Field, claiming they are all matters for the regulator – who won't discuss them. Meanwhile the 31,000 scheme members, busy lobbying their MPs, are running out of time as the deal is due to be signed off by 1 July. So much for a "new level of security for pensions".

With prophets?

PART of Standard Life's successful strategy in winning a vote for de-mutualisiation last week was to reassure long-suffering holders of opaque stock market investments known as "with profits" policies that they would be in safe hands.

As the building society had ripped off endowment savers two years ago by reneging on a promise to pay up what their policies were expected to produce, policyholders were anxious that the new shareholders of a de-mutualised Standard Life would see them right and not cream off too much from their funds. So the board appointed a "with profits" committee to safeguard their interests after the sell-off.

Just how effective this group will be remains to be seen.

Leading members are Lord (Norman) Blackwell, who was on the board when it fleeced the endowment policy holders and who was for years a director of Dixons as it flogged exorbitant warranties and was censured for misleading "interest free" credit deals; and Kent Atkinson, finance director of Lloyds TSB as it mis-sold high-risk precipice bonds to thousands of punters, leading to a record £1.9m fine.

POLICE 5

Seeing red

RETIRED army captain Edmund Carlisle has won the first skirmish in his legal battle to sue police who, when answering a 999 fire call to his house, ended up arresting the 83-year-old.

Dyfed-Powys police last month failed in a court bid to have Captain Carlisle's claim for assault, wrongful arrest and imprisonment thrown out. The case will now go for trial before a judge and jury - although Knacker is still trying to strike out a claim for compensation over losses he and his wife suffered in the blaze.

This curious case came about when a fire broke out at the Carlisle's 16th century manor house near Hay-on-Wye in 2002. The couple dialled 999 and then started to rescue valuable paintings and antiques from the house. "Instead of a quick response from the fire service, eight police officers swarmed on to Capt Carlisle's property," his barrister Dr Michael Arnheim told Cardiff high court. "The police at best misunderstood their duty to save life and limb and in doing so, made the situation so much worse."

Dr Arnheim said that when the Capt and his wife refused to stop retrieving their belongings, police took hold of him and assaulted him while shoving him into the cage in the back of a police van. His wife, Rosemary, 82, was placed in a police car. Capt Carlisle is adamant that neither of them was in any danger, there was no smoke in the part of the house from which they were trying to rescue their belongings and there were three oak doors between them and the fire.

Although there was a national fire crew strike that day, the local Hay-on-Way voluntary crew was on duty but was not alerted for a crucial 33 minutes. When they arrived nine minutes later, the incarcerated Capt Carlisle could not direct them. The house, worth around £600,000, was destroyed along with £143,000 worth of possessions.

Capt Carlisle will have to wait to see if the judge allows his entire claim to go to trial, but he is furious – and has complained to the lord chancellor – that moves to strike out the case had involved four court adjournments by five different judges, causing stress and delay to him and his wife which at their age they can ill afford.

In the City

THE Enron trial has important lessons for those who wish to make British fraud trials more effective, as well as juror and taxpayer friendly.

The convictions of Ken Lay and Jeffrey Skilling not only proved that, if helped, juries can handle complex frauds; but also demonstrated the benefits of plea bargains with key witnesses as well as ensuring an inclusive jury who are able to explain their verdicts publicly.

The result in Houston comes as the Labour government here is looking to remove juries from some Enron style fraud trials, while not fully embracing plea bargains (other than for its latest big new idea, the Serious & Organised Crime Agency), while failing to make jury service effectively compulsory and while gagging jurors.

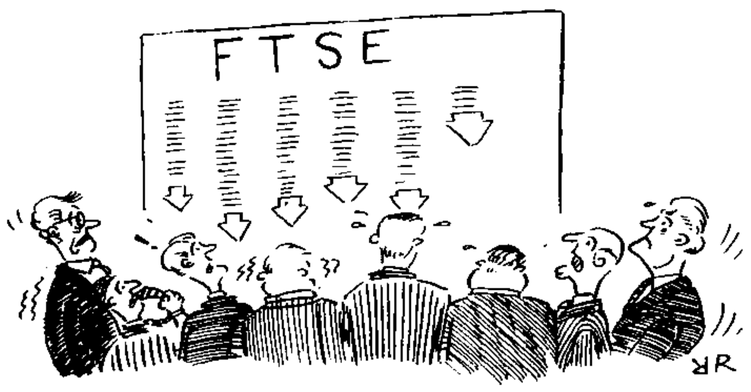
The Enron jury was greatly helped by a prosecution based on the "less is more" approach – rarely chosen in British fraud trials where it is always assumed that "more is more" on the spurious principle that it is important to show "total criminality". The Enron prosecutors built their case not on dissecting the company's opaque accounts but by concentrating on what chairman Lay and chief executive Skilling knew and the lies they told about Enron's real finances to analysts, employees and the public while unloading shares worth more than £50m.

There was no attempt to prove why Enron collapsed – something defence lawyers wanted and which inevitably would have ended up in arcane discussions about accountancy and financial presentation. Instead the focus was on what Lay and Skilling were told when and what they then did. Therefore it all came down to their credibility and honesty – issues juries are equipped to decide, unlike general accounting standards.

The jurors saw both Lay and Skilling give evidence and did not believe their farcical defence that there were no financial problems, never mind fraud, at Enron of which they were aware despite the £35bn company's speedy collapse. The jurors instead believed those Enron insiders who had participated in the fraud and cover-up despite allegations they were singing to save themselves. Of 22 prosecution witnesses, seven had made plea bargains and three had been given immunity.

Jurors in particular relied on former Enron treasurer Ben Glisan who, unlike all the others, was already serving his sentence. They also took the view that the story told by Glisan's ex-colleagues who had done deals was consistent, even though – like former chief financial officer Andrew Fastow – they stood to gain from helping the prosecution to convict Lay and Skilling. "You cannot get everyone to say the same thing," declared one juror.

Unlike the usual British jury for a long fraud trial – which will tend to be those who the trial judge decides have nothing better to do for months (the retired, unemployed and the low paid), the Enron jury was more representative. In the US, to be summoned is to serve – even the president can be called to do jury service. The eight women and four men included a dairy farmer, payroll manager, two engineers, a ship inspector, county court clerk, personnel manager, corporate legal department administrator, retired sales assistant, dental hygienist and an elementary school principal. He had to take care of school business on the one day a week – Friday – the court did not sit.



Spot The Fall Competition

The trial was not allowed to proceed at the pace dictated by the lawyers – as happens all to often in Britain. The court heard evidence from 54 witnesses over 51 days with closing arguments over just three days. There were also some 27 boxes of documentary evidence. Yet the jury came to its decision after deliberating for 33 hours over six days.

Not that Texas justice comes cheap. Lay and Skilling are estimated to have spent approaching £30m defending themselves. Figures that are approached only by those British trials that are measured in months not weeks.

The jury's task was also made easier by the no-nonsense attitude of Judge Sim Lake. Lake constantly told the lawyers to "sharpen their pencils" and discouraged questions which were an "undue waste of our time". The closing arguments were subject to strict time limits. Lay's lead lawyer – he had four in all – was left with just 12 minutes out of six hours in total for both defendants. Lake limited his own instructions to 90 minutes. "Judge Lake was a wonderful judge. He was very kind to us and extremely intelligent," declared one grateful juror. How many British jurors would say the same? How many British judges would be so tough?

Lake was well aware – unlike, it seems, British judges – that the longer the trial the more jurors tire, lose interest or become confused and unable to decide. This is an even greater risk in US trials where unanimous verdicts are required. So delay often aids the defence.

Of course we only know all this because the jury was allowed to give a press conference. All the members were keen to explain why they had convicted the Enron bosses. The outdated British view is that what happens in the jury room must remain secret under pain of prosecution. So politicians and judges continue to make policy without any input from those for whom that policy is designed. Juries could be removed from fraud trials without any insight into why jurors make decisions and what works and what does not in a trial.

The trial also illustrated that another favourite senior suit defence – "it was all approved by the company's lawyers, accountants and bankers" – can be overcome by clear evidence of personal gain from the fraud.

Enron's lawyers, Vinson & Elkins, whitewashed the warning provided to Lay – and fellow Enron director Lord Wakeham – from executive Sherron Watkins that the company could "implode in a wave of accounting scandals". Since the verdict the lawyers – paid $162m over four years – have agreed to pay the bankrupt Enron $30m to settle claims against them.

Wakeham, like all the Enron non-executive directors, is already subject to an investigation by the Securities & Exchange Commission, on hold pending the criminal process. He also faces disciplinary action by the British accountants' regulator, the Joint Disciplinary Scheme, which in turn is waiting on the evidence collected by the SEC. Wakeham may yet face further embarrassment from the civil proceedings brought on behalf of Enron shareholders due in court in the US next October.

Also still in the Enron firing line are some of its bankers, including Barclays and Royal Bank of Scotland.

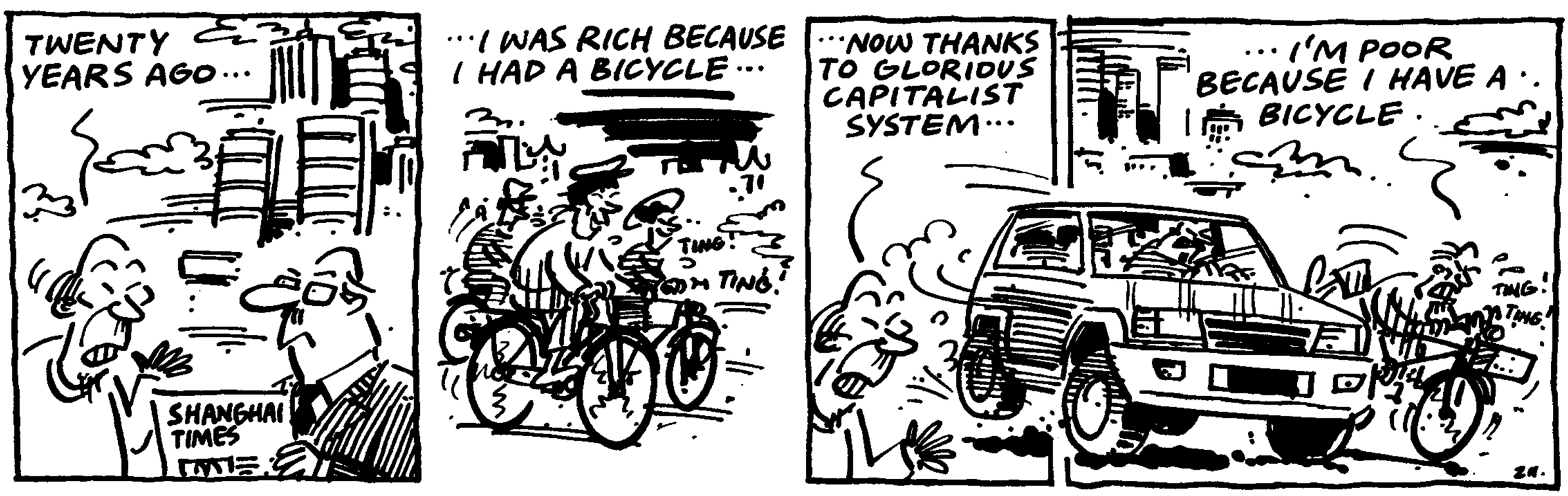
The three former NatWest bankers fighting extradition to Houston on fraud charges will also not have been encouraged by the Enron result. They face evidence being given by Fastow and his former lieutenant Michael Kopper. Kopper did not testify against Lay and Skilling. But in evidence against several Merrill Lynch bankers who were convicted last year, he admitted to ripping off both Enron and NatWest on a deal whereby the bank's stake in a joint investment was sold at an undervalue to a partnership involving the three bankers. "We stood between the two parties in order to skim money off of it," Kopper testified.

Lay and Skilling are due to be sentenced in September. Judge Lake has a reputation for handing out stiff sentences for fraud – unlike his British counterparts. His 24-year sentence on a mid-level executive from Enron rival Dynegy was over-ruled on appeal as too harsh. But the expectation is that, like WorldCom's Bernie Ebbers, the Enron duo could be facing a 25-year sentence. The longest fraud sentence so far handed down in Britain is 14 years on Abbas Gokal for his role in the BCCI collapse. Last month a Californian judge sentenced a Ponzi scheme fraudsmen to 30 years.

The convictions of Lay and Skilling are the culmination of a highly successful campaign by the Enron Taskforce to bring to justice those responsible for what was in 2002 America's biggest ever corporate crash. Thirty-three individuals were ultimately charged of which 16 pleaded guilty, seven have been convicted and

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

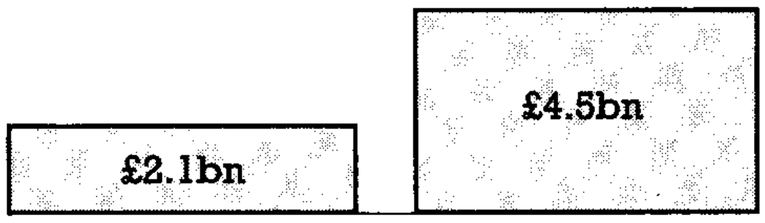


Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Gordon Brown's golden triumph

News on the 60 percent of Britain's gold reserves that the Chancellor sold between 1999 and 2002



...what he sold it for ...what it would be worth today

just two acquitted while the conviction of Enron accountants Arthur Andersen was over-turned by the supreme court.

Compare that with the mixed successes (Guinness, Brent Walker, TransTec) or total failures (Maxwell, SSL and Wickes) of the Serious Farce Office in similar high profile prosecutions. The SFO has nevertheless had some big successes – BCCI, MTM and Versailles (where co-conspirator Fred Clough was a key witness against chairman Carl Cushnie).

Since Enron, the US Justice Department has secured more than 1,000 convictions or guilty pleas for corporate fraud against, among others, more than 160 chief executives or presidents. It has also exacted criminal and civil fines and compensation in excess of $2.3bn. This has been helped by adopting some of the tough tactics previously only used against mobsters and drug dealers.

Without similar US tactics the SFO may be tested to achieve such success in forthcoming trials over NHS price fixing and Independent Insurance.

Since 2001 the SFO has obtained around 100 convictions – compared with some 55 acquittals – and has obtained confiscation orders (mostly in Versailles) of between £30m and £40m. Although how much will ever be collected is another question.

Enron also showed up the media and the analysts. Enron survived as long as it did because neither ever asked the right questions until near the end. Much of the off-balance sheet fraud orchestrated by Fastow was hinted at in company filings. There were red flags, in particular the lack of transparency about how Enron made its money.

But journalists were much happier writing up Lay, Skilling and Fastow as celebrities. Many analysts simply accepted what Enron told them. Even when *Fortune* magazine raised questions in early 2001, the band played on. Lay lied to *Business Week* after Skilling suddenly quit and it printed his lies. Skilling hinted his decision might have been influenced by the falling Enron share price. Still nobody took the hint until the *Wall Street Journal* jumped all over Enron and accelerated the death spiral.

Financial journalists found Enron too complex, too difficult and too hardball to mess with. Much better to say nice things or nothing. An attitude adopted towards Robert Maxwell, which enabled the pension pillager to survive so long. Questions were never raised about whether the numbers made sense – Andersen always ensured they added up – or why there were huge revenues but little cash.

The Enron lessons have still not been learned in London. Today the smartest guys in the room are running hedge funds and private equity funds or trading ever more complex financial derivatives. They too rely on opaqueness and the "too difficult" approach of journalists who prefer to create rich lists and chronicle the lifestyles of these latest Masters of the Universe. Like Enron, they may not be too big to fail leaving behind acres of cringing City coverage.

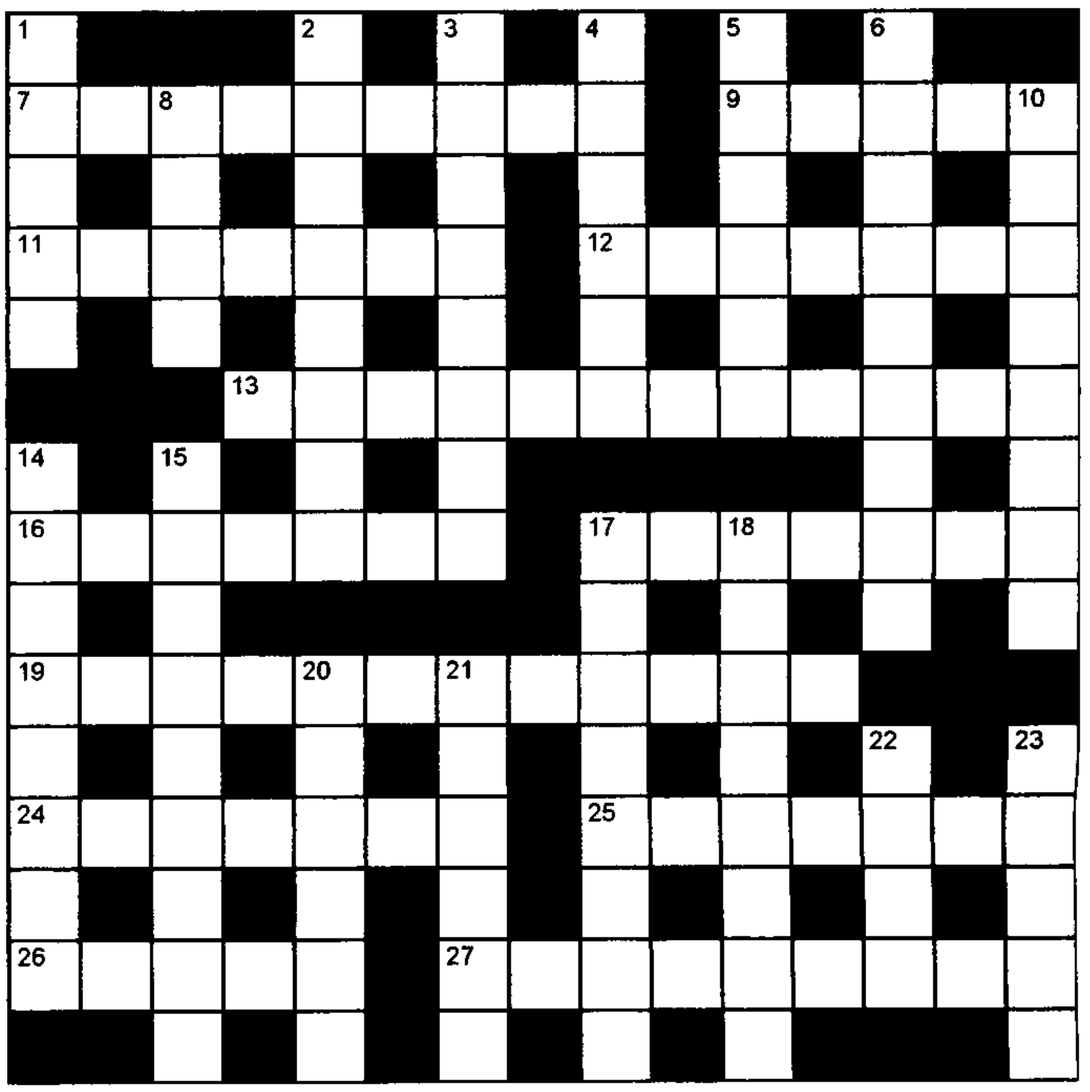
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 315

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 16 June 2006

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

7 Piss yourself surrounded by old South Americans working together (2,7)
9 Shag, not quiet, gets three points for her (5)
11 Clit stimulated with sun is good for a sore throat (7)
12 Tories would like to be this popular party, initially, one to whom a loan's been made (2,5)
13 Birds question tosh put out by Davina? (4,4,4)
16 One of Brenda's men gets to doubt almost completely penetrating Brenda (7)
17 Distress of university at centre of "shag-in" fiasco (7)
19/25 It stresses out women – but the real bleeding trouble comes later! (12,7)
24 Cyclops's infantile protection against TV series piss artist (7)
25 See 19ac.
26 Tender "love god" going round bend (5)
27 Crafty sort of thrust from Ron or Reggie coupling with Roger (4-5)

DOWN

1/22 Play the goat with Jeffrey Archer? (5,4)
2 The one I told you about – ageing pop performer, has-been PM! (8)
3 The business of pressing the flesh and – phwoar! – flabby "tyres" (8)
4 Biblical type breathes first class by middle of flipping shag (6)
5 A couple of gropes, fruit? (6)
6 It's highly popular in Wales, making (on getting end away) Nadia swoon (9)
8 Switch clients as "madam" does? (4)
10 Like a lousy type giving himself hand relief? (8)
14 Hospital learner involved in penile operation – it could keep you hanging on for ages (8)
15 Urinate, centrally, right into beer mug, upsetting the city (9)
17 Song *Get Naked*, cut in the jungle? (8)
18 Slag off Tony's awful yen to depart from openness (8)
20 Those common people getting stud to do some "relief" work (6)
21 No big fish, the fool gets all round *Sun* coverage (6)
22 See 1dn.
23 Cocaine, unknown quantity, liable to produce a fall (5)

Crossword 314 winner: DAWN SPOONER

ACROSS: 9 The Centre 10/3 Prick teaser 11 Impasse 12 Epithet 13/15 Power struggle 16 Rosetta 18 Paragon 20 Disunity 22 Big shot 23 Deadpan 25 Groin 26 Civil list.

DOWN: 1 Stripper 2/21A Keep shtum 4 Stye 5 Telegraphy 6 Springer 7 Night-light 8 Skit 14 Washington 15 Statistics 17 Touching 19 Nominate 21 Smalls 22 Bogs 23 Diva 24 Prig.

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OM SAI RAM

A fitting end to the ill-fitting British suit

A suitable man to spark a men's clothing revolution

Consider this proposition. Would you rather pay the same sum for a single, off-the-peg, chain store suit cut by a computer and sold to you by a spotty boy who thinks side vents are to be found on a Lambretta scooter, or for two bespoke, custom cut, hand-stitched suits, measured and sold to you by a man for whom suits are a lifetime's passion?

The British clothing chain store has a lot to fear from ***Mr. Raja M Daswani*** of Kowloon. If there were a global ambassador for men's suiting, Mr Daswani, who owns and runs Hong Kong's biggest tailoring business, would be that man. He and his family team measure and make hundreds of suits a week for discerning clients across the world.

Indeed, so successful is ***Mr. Daswani***, that – a little unnervingly as he is measuring you up – he freely admits he doesn't really need to work any more: 'My team is as experienced as I am. But I just love men's suits and I wouldn't feel right sitting at home. It's not a business, it's a mission.

'I love seeing customers walk in a really bad suit that cost them a fortune and walk out in one of our suits that's perfect in every way, made with a good heart in a superior fabric for a half or a quarter as much.'

The price of a Daswani shirt and suit are astonishing. We are talking from £19 (£25 including tax and duty) for a custom shirt and £129 (£169 including tax and duty) for a fully lined, made-to measure suit in a lightweight wool or linen, to £250 (£325 including tax and duty) for a 100 per cent wool, entirely hand finished suit in a British cloth, with every refinement from handmade button holes to knee lining. Even the most expensive suit, made in deluxe superfine wool for £1,500 (£1,950 including tax and duty), costs a third less than it would on **Savile Row**.

Raja Daswani may be based in Hong Kong, but his sartorial mission to the badly dressed and overpaying British customer brings him to the UK as often as once a month. He and his team take over hotel suites in major cities, so British customers can make an appointment and get the full Kowloon Monty.

Measurements and digital photos are taken here and emailed to Hong Kong. Often, your suit will be started on by a tailor 6,000 miles away before you've even left the hotel. You can have it couriered within a week or so, or wait for a second fitting when the Raja team hits your town again a few weeks later.

It now remains to see whether the Raja revolution, with its inspired mix of artistic flair, entrepreneurial genius and digital technology, will see the end of the off-the peg British chain store suit. On price alone, it's a sartorial solution that will even please the Suits in accounts.

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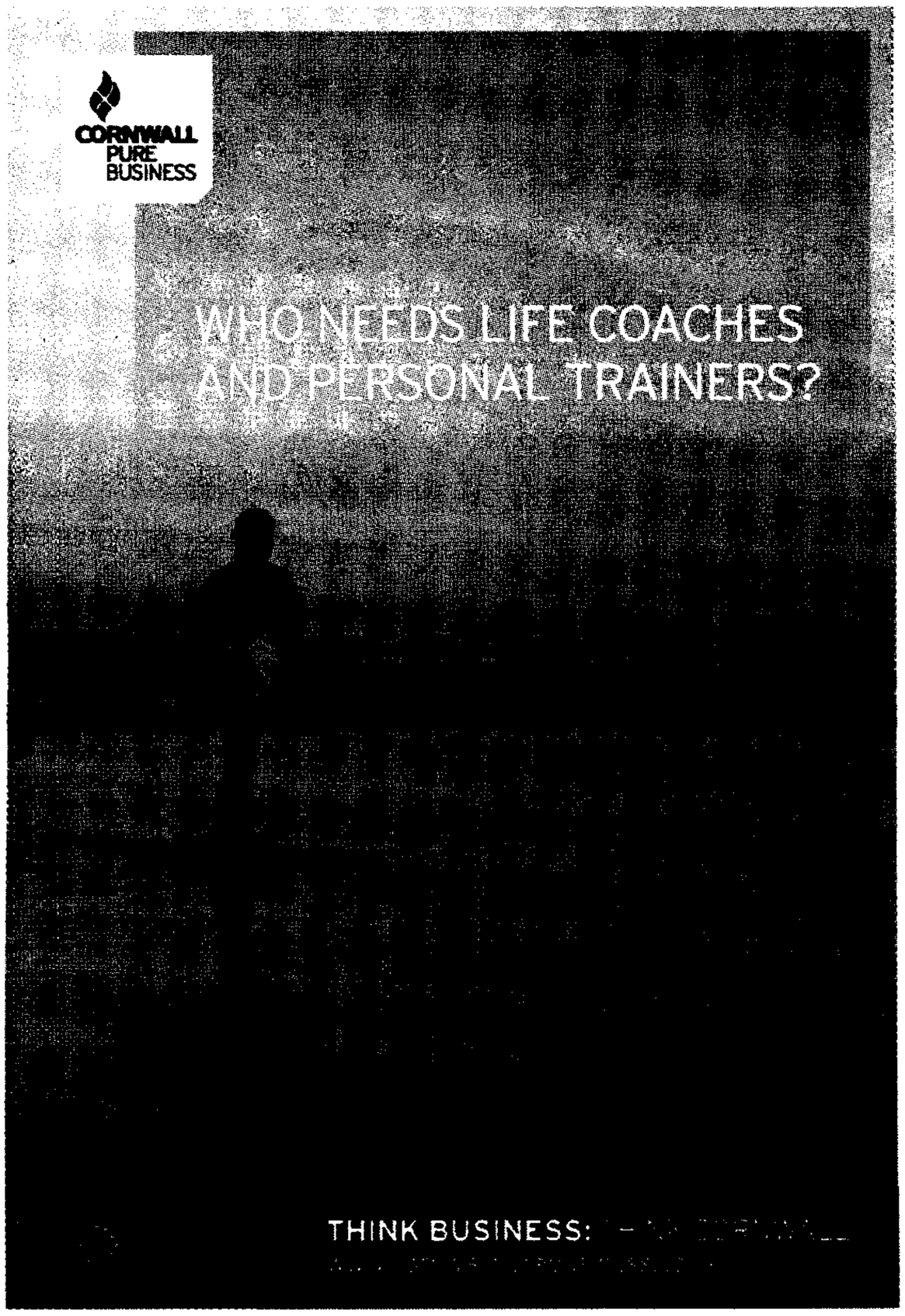

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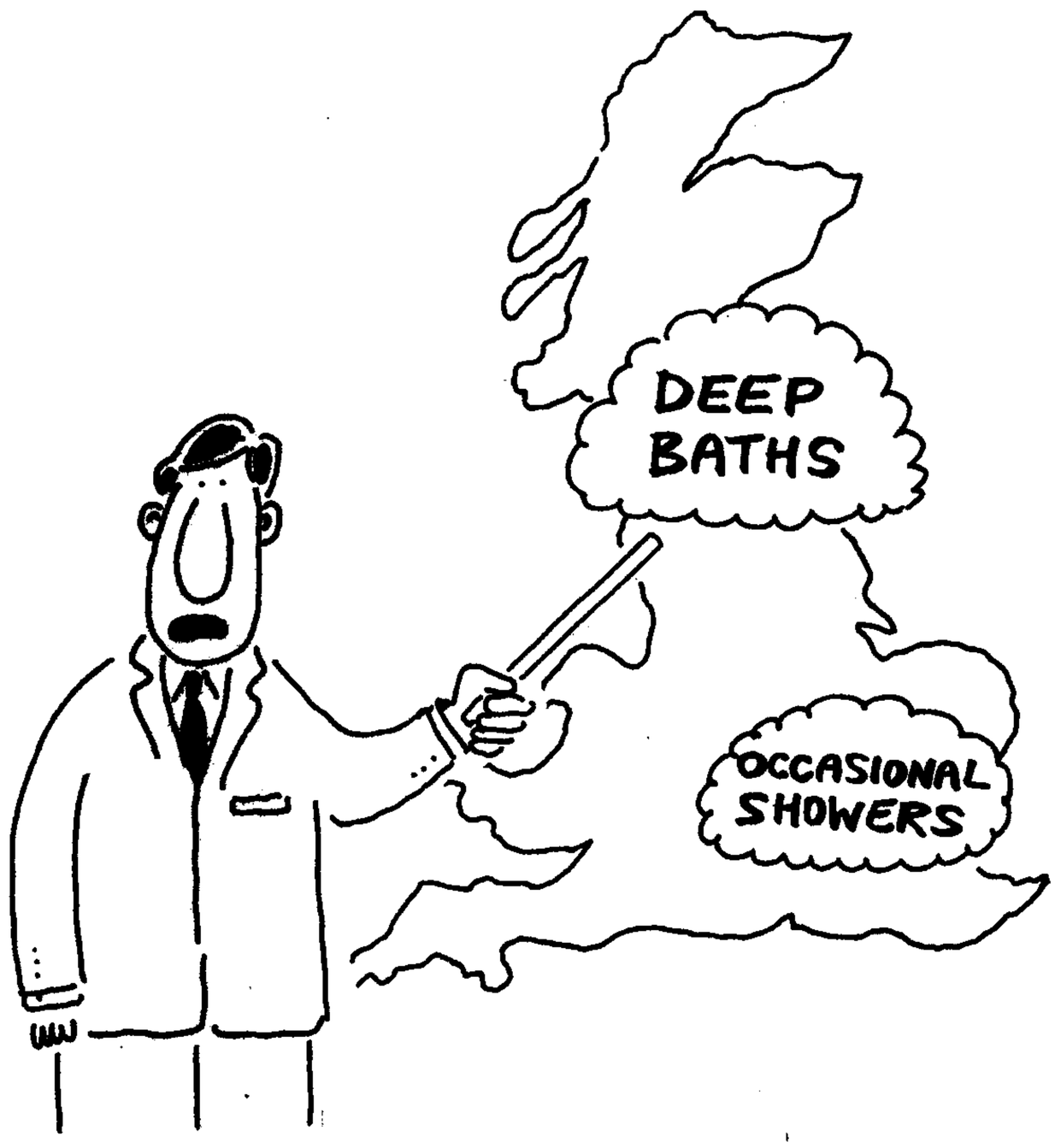

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